NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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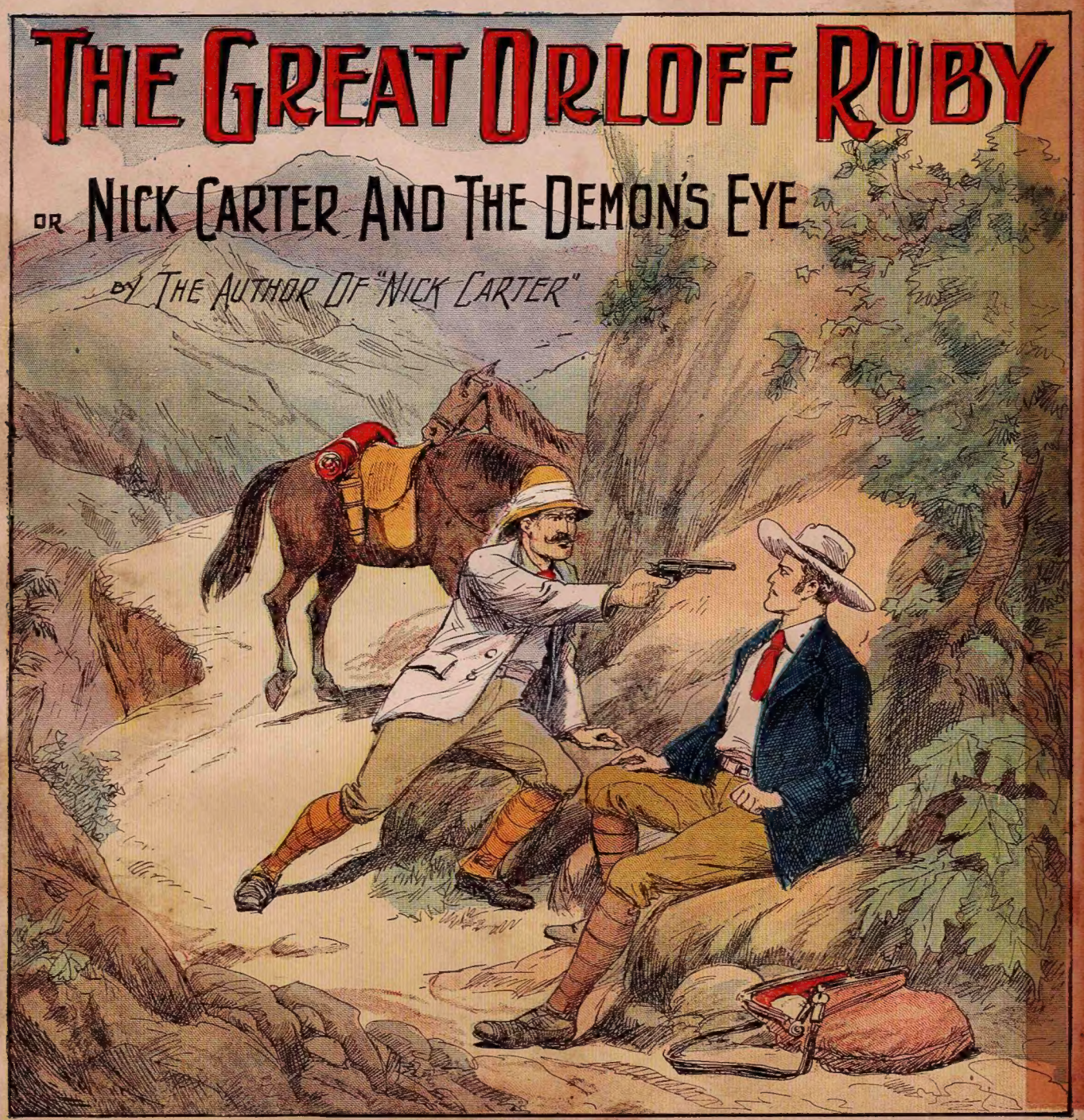
THE GREAT ORLOFF RUBY

OR NICK CARTER AND THE DEMON'S EYE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



"Lock your fingers together over the top of your head, Nick Carter, and keep them there, or I will kill you as I would a snake!" said Maitland Carruthers, slowly.

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THE GREAT ORLOFF RUBY;

OR,

Nick Carter and "The Demon's Eye."

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

"THE DEMON'S EYE."

It was a few minutes past the hour of midnight when Nick Carter was called to the telephone. He had been passing the evening quietly in his own home, and had not yet retired, so he lost no time in replying to the summons of his telephone bell.

Just a week had elapsed since he succeeded so well in unveiling the mysteries connected with the theft of the pear-shaped diamonds from the jewelry establishment of Orloff & Co., and during that week, such work as had been in his hands had been delegated to the assistants; in a word, the great detective had been resting, reading and studying.

When he picked up the receiver and placed it against his ear, the following conversation ensued:

"I wish to speak with Mr. Carter in person," said the voice at the other end of the telephone wire.

"Who is it that wishes to speak with him?" asked Nick, in reply.

"Peyton Storms, president of Orloff & Co."

"How are you, Mr. Storms," said the detective, heartily. "I thought I recognized your voice, but I was not sure of it. You have me right here at the phone. What can I do for you to-night?"

"I want to discuss a very important matter with you at once. Will you come to my house, or shall I go to yours?"

"Either, Mr. Storms. I have not yet retired, and I can go to you, if you prefer it."

"If it would not be too great an inconvenience, Carter, I would prefer it that way," was the reply.

"Very well; I think you may expect me in about half an hour."

And so it happened that a little before one o'clock in the morning, Nick Carter was closeted with Peyton Storms

in the sumptuous library of the Storms residence on Riverside Drive.

"It was very kind of you to consent to come here to me, Carter," said the president of the great jewelry house.

"To tell you the truth," replied Nick, smiling, "I was feeling the need of a little exercise and was very glad of an excuse to come out into the night air. But you have something on your mind, so let us get at it at once. What is the matter now, Mr. Storms?"

"Carter," said Storms, speaking with marked deliberation, "have you ever heard of 'The Demon's Eye'?"

"Often," replied Nick, laughing, "although possibly not to the same one to which you refer."

"I refer to a jewel; to a monster ruby; to a stone that is known the world over as the 'Great Orloff Ruby'; to a ruby which for centuries before it came into our possession, bore the name of 'The Demon's Eye.'"

"No; I can't say that I ever did hear of it."

"It is of almost priceless value. It was purchased by our firm, seventeen years ago, for one million dollars in cash, and has been in our possession ever since. It is safely worth ten times that amount, however."

"Ten million dollars for one ruby?" said Nick, incredulously.

"I have already informed you that it is priceless. It is the largest and most perfect stone of its kind in the world. It would be impossible to place a price upon it. The real value of such gems is, of course, dependent upon the cupidity of a possible purchaser, and there are no purchasers for stones such as 'The Demon's Eye.' And even if there were, it would not, under any circumstances, or for any price, be for sale."

"Very well, then. Now what is the matter with 'The Demon's Eye'? Has it got a mote in it? I am no oculist, Mr. Storms."

"This is hardly a subject for joking, Carter. The matter with 'The Demon's Eye' is that it has disappeared."

"Eh? Disappeared?"

"Vanished."

"But surely, Mr. Storms, a gem of such extraordinary value must have been safeguarded in accordance with its importance," said Nick.

"It was; at least, we have always believed that it was —until now."

"When was it first missed from the place where it was kept?"

"To-day; late this afternoon, in fact."

"And why, if you intended to retain me in the matter, did you wait until midnight to communicate with me about it, may I ask?"

"I was not informed of the loss, personally, until an hour ago. I telephoned to you without delay, then."

"How does it happen that you did not know about it sooner, Mr. Storms?"

"I left my office at the establishment at noon to-day, and did not return there. I had private affairs to attend to, and I did not even arrive home until eleven o'clock."

"And then I suppose you found somebody awaiting you to give you this bit of interesting information."

"I found our entire board of directors here awaiting me. We held an informal meeting in this room and discussed the matter to what extent we could, after which I dismissed them with the agreement that we would take the matter up again in the morning."

"What do you—or what did they know—about the disappearance of the stone?"

"Nothing! Absolutely nothing save that it has disappeared. I would have kept the gentlemen here until you arrived had there been any need of it; but they know no more about it than I am able to tell you alone. Not so much, in fact, for I know more about the history of the stone than anybody."

"Do I understand you that the ruby was stolen from its place of safe-keeping some time to-day?"

"We do not know when it was stolen."

"How is that?"

"For the reason that a most perfect imitation was put in its place—an imitation so perfect that tests had to be applied to it before my associates could be convinced that it was not the genuine 'Demon's Eye' that was before them."

"And have you no idea when this imitation was substituted for the real gem?"

"I have only one idea about it; I know that the substitution was made some time during the last forty-five days."

"Forty-five days. That is a considerable lapse of time."

"I know it is."

"How do you fix upon that time?"

"Very simply. It is just forty-five days to-day since the ruby was last taken from its case. You must understand that we do not every day visit a gem so rare and valuable as 'The Demon's Eye.' It is only on state occasions that it is exhibited at all, and even at such times, only under the most exclusive conditions."

"I can understand that to be the case."

"Forty-five days ago to-day a gentleman who is known to the firm, called upon me and stated that he was making a tour of the world with an Indian prince—the rajah of Bahmpoor—and asked me if I would consent to exhibit the ruby to the prince. After some demur, I consented."

"And you did exhibit it to him, eh?"

"Yes; at three o'clock that afternoon; but only to him and Carruthers——"

"Is Carruthers the name of the man who made the request to you?"

"Yes."

"It is rather strange how often I run across that name

in my professional experience. I have twice had to do with men of that name, Mr. Storms, and each time I have found them to be the slickest articles I ever stacked up against. Perhaps you will recall the experience I had with a diamond smuggler of that name, twelve years ago?"

"Certainly I remember it; very well, indeed."

"And later, with a brother of his who was almost as crafty as the other one?"

"Yes; I remember reading about that affair in the papers."

"Now, I wonder if by any chance this Carruthers to whom you refer, is related to those two master criminals, eh?"

"I think not. I don't know; but now that you remind me of it, he certainly does suggest the original Carruthers—the smuggler, I mean, although he does not resemble him. That Carruthers was a blond, if I remember correctly.

"Well, this man is the exact opposite. His hair and mustache are jet black. His complexion is that of a brunette, too, although it is startlingly white at that, if you can understand what I mean."

"Yes; I understand."

"In other ways he does suggest the original Carruthers. He is tall, well built and as graceful as an antelope."

"You said he was known to the firm; in what way?"

"Merely as a customer. He is an expert in all precious stones—one of the best I ever knew, too—and he makes large purchases, on commission, I believe. We never know who his customers are, but he has bought more than three hundred thousand dollars worth of gems of us during the past year."

"A customer not to be despised, and one to whom a reasonable request such as he made about the ruby would be readily granted."

"Certainly."

"Now, to return. You exhibited the ruby to the Indian prince at three o'clock in the afternoon, forty-five days ago, and there were present at the time only the prince and this man Carruthers, aside from your own people."

"Yes."

"And your own people included—whom?"

"Myself; Mr. Beauchamp, our secretary; Mr. Krebs, whom you know; Mr. Compton, whom you also know, and the head of our detective department, Mr. Ralston."

"Do you think that there was any opportunity for juggling with the ruby at that time?"

"I am absolutely and unfalteringly positive that there was no such opportunity."

"You saw the stone returned to its proper place at that time, yourself?"

"I did; I was the last one to touch it."

"You are convinced that it was not taken then?"

"I am as positive of it as I am that we are together in this room."

"And I am to understand that you have not seen the stone since that time?"

"I have not seen the ruby since it was shown to the Indian prince, forty-five days ago."

"What was the occasion of the discovery to-day?"

"Mr. Morgan—the financier, you know—asked to have the ruby shown to three of his friends this afternoon. It was shown to them. They admired it greatly, and went away satisfied that they had seen 'The Demon's Eye.' It was not until after they had gone, when Krebs and Compton and Ralston were returning it to its place that the truth was discovered."

"Who was the first to discover it?"

"Krebs; and he made the discovery only through an accident."

"How was that?"

"In placing the case in its receptacle, he hit his elbow and so jarred the case that the stone was half overturned. He picked it up to replace it in its bed, when he thought he noticed something strange about it. An examination revealed what had been done."

"Was Krebs here to-night with the others?"

"Certainly."

"And you and he are both positive that the substitution had not been already made when the ruby was shown to the Indian prince?"

"We are each absolutely certain on that point."

"Now tell me who knows about this affair? Who has been informed that the ruby is missing?"

"The members of our board of directors, Ralston, the head of our detective department, and Compton. Nobody else."

"You will, of course, keep the matter of its disappearance a secret?"

"Most certainly."

"You see, it will be better if the parties who were instrumental in making the substitution should not be made aware that you have discovered the theft. The imitation was manufactured and ultimately placed where you found it in order that a long time might elapse before you discovered your loss."

"Certainly."

"And it is our duty to play that part of the game out to the end. Whoever took the ruby was aware of the fact that it is only exhibited at rare intervals."

"Assuredly."

"What is the longest time you have known to elapse between two exhibitions of 'The Demon's Eye,' Mr. Storms?"

"I have known it to lie in its case unseen for almost two years at a time, Carter."

"So it is safe to assume that the thief or thieves do

not expect that you will discover your loss for some time to come."

"I think it is."

"I think now, with these preliminaries, we may go into some of the other conditions of the case; and before we enlarge upon the safeguards placed around the stone, the place where it was kept, and all that, I think I would like to hear something about its history. Stones of that sort and of such immense value, usually have strange and tragic histories."

"'The Demon's Eye' is not an exception to the rule, Mr. Carter."

"I supposed not."

"It has a strange and a wonderful history."

"Which you are familiar with, I suppose?"

"I know more of its history than any other man, but I am afraid, when all is said, that I know but little of all that might be told about it."

"It is a very old stone, I suppose? That is, it has been in existence a great many years."

"More years—or, rather, more centuries than we know about. Somewhere in the world—in India, I suppose—there exists a complete history of the stone, but——"

"Ah! That was a fortunate remark of yours. It is possible that the visit of that Indian prince might have had something to do with this affair. It is worth a thought, at least."

"It had not occurred to me; but, as you say, it is suggestive."

"And now, will you tell me as much of the history of the ruby as you know?"

CHAPTER II.

SAFEGUARDING A PRICELESS GEM.

"I have already told you," said Peyton Storms, "that the ruby came into the possession of my firm seventeen years ago, have I not?"

"Yes."

"It was sold to us for a million dollars by a firm of London bankers, which acted as the agent for the owner."

"And the owner. Who was he?"

"We never knew the name of the owner, although we do know that it was owned by a woman, and not by a man."

"How was that?"

"Let me explain how the matter was first brought to our attention."

"If you please."

"A representative of the London banking house called upon us one day and told us that his concern was acting as agent for the sale of the ruby. His statement, in effect, was as follows:

"'A priceless ruby, originally from India, has been placed in our hands for sale. The present owner is a lady of high rank, who stands very much in need of funds, and her sole resource for procuring the money she requires, is this ruby. Her proprietorship of the gem is unquestioned and unquestionable, for it has descended to her through many generations. Of this she possesses incontestable proof, and this proof our house has examined, so that we can stake our reputation upon your title to the stone if you decide to purchase.

"'It is not a stone which any firm could buy,' he continued, 'and several houses in Paris and in London have declined to make the purchase, on the ground that they could not afford to tie up so much capital in an article which, because of its high value, is not readily negotiable.'

"To render the story somewhat shorter, Mr. Carter, we ultimately purchased the stone. We wanted it; we were convinced of the reliability of the firm with which we dealt in making the purchase, and we accepted a bond from them that if the title to the stone was ever successfully contested, we would be reimbursed for all loss so sustained.

"Now, the history of the stone, beyond what I have already told you, did not come into my possession until seven years later; and then, happening to be in London, I called upon the senior member of the firm through whom we made the purchase.

"I told him at that time that I was very anxious to know the history of the ruby, and, after considerable urging, he consented to tell me all he knew about it.

"I remember the remark with which he began the recital. It was: 'Seven years has passed since you purchased the ruby, and there can be no harm now in telling you all I know about it; more especially because the lady for whom we sold it is now dead.'

"Stripped of all unnecessary detail, the story of the stone is this:

"It had been for very many generations in the possession of one of the many so-called royal families of India. It had descended from father to son for centuries, and had been regarded by them with a species of superstitious awe and reverence, and it was believed to carry with it a certain charm which forever protected its possessor from all the ills the flesh is heir to—and all that. Of course you and I know that all that sort of thing is utter rot."

"The Indian rajahs don't so regard it," said Nick, dryly.

"No; I am quite well aware of that."

"The lady who sold the stone to us through the London banking house was the last of her race, and the ruby had fallen to her for the reason that there was no male descendant of the family left to inherit it.

"This lady, a princess in her own right, if my informant was correct, was occidental, rather than oriental, in her tastes. At all events, contrary to all the teachings of her

ancestors, she married an Englishman, thus placing her family out of the pale of recognition in her own country forever.

"But the stone was indisputably her property.

"Notwithstanding that fact, however, a determined effort had been made by others among the high-caste Indian families, to possess themselves of the stone, by fair means or by foul. They had sought to purchase it, but the princess who owned it was determined that it should not remain in India and be owned by another Indian family.

"Frequent attempts were made to steal the ruby from her, and on several occasions she barely escaped with her life.

"The result of it all was that she ultimately decided to journey to London and there to finally dispose of the stone, both because the nonpossession of it would bring her immunity from the constant attacks that had been made upon her, and—because she needed the money.

"It is the old cry, you know. However, according to my informant, the banker, she had a certain principle about disposing of it, which was that she would not consent, under any circumstances, to sell it to one of the royal houses of Europe nor would she dispose of it to any individual, her reason being that if it were possessed by an individual, it would only insure his death; in other words, that individual would some day be murdered because of the ruby.

"The banker told me that it was the princess herself who suggested Orloff & Co. as possible purchasers.

"Now, that is the story of the ruby, as far as I know it.

"We purchased it, and placed it in our safe-deposit receptacle, where it has remained ever since that time, until now."

"And what became of the princess? Did the banker tell you that?"

"She lived quietly in St. John's Wood, London, for five years after she sold the ruby to us. Two years after the sale she became a widow, and three years later she died."

"How did she die? Do you happen to know that?"

"No; I did not inquire and the banker did not inform me."

"Well, what more?"

"That is all."

"Do you know if this India princess who married the Englishman and who sold you the ruby, had a child, or children?"

"No, I do not. But what can that have to do with the affair?"

"Probably nothing at all. I merely asked the question, that is all."

"Well, that is the history of the ruby so far as I am aware of it. We have never regretted the purchase. Our money is as safely invested there as elsewhere, and now that the wealth of the world is increasing so rapidly, we could at any time get our money out of it, together with the interest that money would have earned for us."

"You mean that you could do so if you had the ruby."

"Yes; that is what I mean."

"That is rather an interesting story, Mr. Storms. And now, in that immediate connection, I will ask you a few questions."

"Very well."

"Have you ever, during these seventeen years you have owned the ruby, had one of those people in your employ?"

"One of what people?"

"A Hindu."

"No; never."

"Are you quite sure about that?"

"Why, yes. We have had several foreigners, of course; some of them very dark; but there has been no Hindu among them."

"Have you any customers whom you recall, who might have hailed from that part of the world?"

"I do not know of any. Of course I do not know who our customers are. There are hundreds—yes, thousands, of whom I have never heard at all, and whom I have never seen."

"Do you know if any persons who would answer to the description of Hindus have been noticed around your store during the last forty-five days?"

"I do not know; but Ralston could answer that question better than I."

"Naturally. I will ask him."

"Why are you particular about that point, Carter?"

"Merely because I am almost certain in my own mind that the purloiners of your ruby are in some way connected, or, rather, associated, with its Indian history. That is the only reason."

Peyton Storms shrugged his shoulders.

"It is possible," he said. "I won't pretend to be a judge of that. That part of the affair is up to you. The whole point of the thing is that the ruby is gone, and that I want you to recover it for us. You need spare no expense whatever. Spend all the money you wish to spend, and wherever you wish to spend it. Only get back that ruby if it is possible to do it."

"We can at least make an effort to recover it, Mr. Storms."

"What surprises me, Carter, is that thus far you have not asked me a single question concerning the manner in which the ruby was kept and safeguarded by the firm."

"That is because I hadn't gotten to it yet; but you can tell me about it now, if you will do so."

"I suppose you know that we have a system of safe-deposit vaults in our establishment, as completely

equipped as those of any safe-deposit company in the city, eh?"

"Yes; I knew that."

"The safe-deposit section of our concern is divided into two departments, one of which is for the use of our customers—our regular customers, of course—and the other is for our own use."

"Well?"

"In the center of our own department in the safe-deposit basement, there is a large compartment, ten by twelve feet in extent, and eight feet standing room. In the very center of this compartment to which I now refer, and which we designate at the store as the strong box, is a heavy steel casket, which we had made expressly for the reception of 'The Demon's Eye'; and that steel box we call by the name of the Ruby Casket. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well; that is where the ruby has been kept ever since we have had it in our possession."

"Now tell me," said Nick, "if I were to apply to you to-morrow to show me 'The Demon's Eye,' and you consented to exhibit it, just what would be the *modus operandi* of that expedition."

"Why, it would be as follows: I would call Krebs, and Compton, and Ralston to my room and present them to you. We would then go together to the safe-deposit department and the door of the strong box would be opened for us."

"Wait. Who would open that strong box?"

"Krebs, or myself. Any member of the firm can open it, or he can delegate the duty to another, if it should become necessary. For example, I have often sent Compton to it. But I will say this: Nobody of less importance in the establishment than the head of one of the departments would be assigned to such a duty."

"How is the strong box opened? With a key? or a combination?"

"With a key. But you must remember that there are two guards on duty inside the safe-deposit department throughout the day, and that one of them always accompanies any person who visits one of the safes, even if it should be one of the firm."

"Very good. Now please continue."

"I neglected to mention that each night the several keys to the strong box are deposited with me, and I in turn lock them inside the safe in my office. If I happen to be absent, Mr. Krebs receives them."

"Yes. Well?"

"With the ruby casket—the steel box in which the ruby has always been kept—it is very different."

"How so?"

"Three keys are required to open that box."

"Three separate keys?"

"Yes."

"Who holds those keys?"

"I have one; Krebs has one, and Compton has the third."

"Why Compton? He is not a member of the firm."

"No; but he is always there, and has been there for more than twenty years."

"Well, what is the operation of opening the steel casket?"

"Compton holds key No. 1; Krebs has No. 2, and I have the third. They all fit into the same keyhole. Compton puts in his key and turns it twice around; Krebs follows and does precisely the same. My key has to be turned but once."

"Rather a complicated affair, isn't it?"

"It is the most remarkable lock that was ever made. We paid eight thousand dollars for the casket and the lock, and there is not another one like it in the world."

"What is the next thing in order?"

"Having unlocked the box, I raise the lid, and that act discloses the inside of a beautifully made casket, and in the center of the interior, on a satin pillow, rests a small, square box that is made of solid gold."

"Humph!" said Nick. "You didn't spare expense, did you?"

"No; indeed we did not. That would make an impression on an intended purchaser."

"How large is that gold box?"

"It is eight inches square and four inches deep. It is lined with white satin, and the great Orloff Ruby reposes in the center of it."

"How do you open the gold box?"

"It is opened by touching a spring at the back of the box near the center. The spring is not very cleverly concealed. Anyone might find it after a little searching."

"Well, we have reached the ruby now. What happens next?"

"This: You, as the spectator, would be waiting just outside the strong box—that is, the big vault."

"Yes; I remember the names you have given."

"I would lift the gold box in my hands and carry it outside, closely followed by Ralston and Krebs, and we would pass into the counting room of the vault. If you were especially an honored guest, and requested to see the ruby in the light of day, we would pass out of the safe-deposit department entirely, to a room that is directly over it, and there I would touch the spring and show you the ruby."

"Would I be permitted to hold it in my hand?" asked Nick.

"If you were especially honored—yes; otherwise, no."

"How was it in the case of the rajah of Bahmpoor?"

"He did not touch it; nobody touched the ruby itself, that day. It was not lifted from its bed of white satin."

"No?" said Nick. "How, then, are you so positive that it had not already disappeared at that time? Tell me that."

CHAPTER III.

THE RAJAH OF SAHARANPORE APPEARS.

"Now, what is the operation of returning the ruby to its place in the steel casket?" asked the detective.

"Practically the same as that of getting it out, although you would be left in the room where you viewed it while we returned it to its place. Ralston would remain with you, and Krebs. Compton and I would carry it back."

"When, I suppose, practically the same operation of locking it up would be gone through with."

"Precisely. I would put it in the casket and use my key, turning it once around. Krebs would follow, and then Compton, after which the strong box itself would be locked, and the exhibition would be over."

"I see only one weak point in this whole recital," said the detective, "and that exists in the fact that you really have no idea when the ruby disappeared."

"It was there forty-five days ago."

"Tut, tut, man! You do not know that."

"I do know it."

"Pardon me, you do not. You did not touch it that day. You have just asserted that nobody touched it that day, and therefore it might have been the imitation you saw, and not the real gem."

"I am convinced——"

"So was Krebs convinced to-day, when the ruby was shown to Morgan, until he struck his elbow against something and so moved the stone. I am convinced that you do not know. Tell me when was the last time before the visit of the rajah, that the ruby was exhibited?"

"Why—let me see—it was somewhere about four months ago. I can give you the exact date when you come to the establishment to-morrow—for I suppose you will come there, won't you?"

"Certainly."

"How will you come? I mean—er—in what character will you appear."

"I think," replied the detective, with studied deliberation, "that I will appear in the character of an Indian rajah, and I will be accompanied by an attendant."

"A good idea!" exclaimed Storms. "Capital!"

"So," continued Nick, "if you should receive word in your private office that the maharajah of Something-or-other wishes to see you, you will know that it is Nick Carter."

"And I will be ready for you. You will, of course, ask to see 'The Demon's Eye'?"

"Of course."

"Then we understand each other."

"Perfectly; and now I will say good-night."

"Wait a moment. I want to ask two or three questions. I want you to give me some opinion of this remarkable affair. Have you any idea——"

"My dear Mr. Storms, would you attempt to pass upon the value of a diamond from a description given to you by another person?"

"Certainly not."

"Yet that is precisely what you are asking me to do now."

"But——"

"So far as I can see into the matter, the disappearance of 'The Demon's Eye' is ten times more mysterious than was that other case of yours, the taking of the pear-shaped diamonds. In that case there could have been only one way to accomplish the theft, and it only remained for me to find out that way. In this case it seems to me that there might have been several ways. I think, as a matter of fact, that it will be much easier to recover the ruby than it will to discover how it was taken from the casket."

"Well, Carter," said Storms, "I will promise you this: If you will recover the ruby and return it to us, I don't care a rap to know how it was taken away."

"But I do," said Nick. "And I mean to find out, too."

"That as you please. It is the ruby we want. Bring it to us and you may name your own reward."

* * * * * * *

It was at half-past ten o'clock the following morning when the employees and customers who happened at that time to be at Orloff's, were both interested and amazed by the appearance of a gorgeously attired Indian prince, who entered the store, accompanied by two serving men, apparently of his own nationality, and who were almost as expensively costumed as their master.

The rajah—for such he appeared to be—was swarthy of skin and as handsome as a god, and he walked with a stately tread, which convinced all who saw him that he was descended from a long line of princes and potentates.

Having passed through the front entrance, he advanced about fifty feet inside the store, when he paused and was heard to deliver some order in a foreign tongue to one of his two followers.

That individual bowed profoundly and advanced toward the superintendent of the store, who was already hastening toward them.

The reader has already guessed that the rajah was no other than the detective, and that the two servants he brought with him were Ten-Ichi and Patsy; it was Ten-Ichi who stepped forward to meet the superintendent of the store, and as he saluted him with a gesture that was somewhat haughty, he said, with just a touch of foreign accent to his speech:

"My august master, who is the rajah of Saharanpore, presents his compliments to your master, and has commanded me to say that he would consider it an honor if he were permitted to view your wonderful ruby, 'The Demon's Eye.'"

It was evident that the superintendent had not anticipated this request, for he hesitated a moment, and then, realizing that the wish was one which should be conveyed to the president of the company, he replied:

"If your master will step this way into the reception room, I will inform the president of the company that he is here."

Ten-Ichi bowed, returned to the supposed rajah, said something to him in Hindustanee, at which he saluted the superintendent with a stately but distant inclination of his head, after which they all took up the line of march toward the rear of the store.

Every eye in the place followed them as they made their way through the length of the building, and well they might, for Nick Carter's costume was gorgeously and wonderfully made.

It was of the very finest silk, and his whole raiment literally glittered with precious stones.

There was a chain of emeralds around his neck which was evidently attached to a watch concealed somewhere among the folds of his garments. His great turban blazed with diamonds, sapphires, rubies, opals, pearls and other precious stones, and there was more than one spectator to the scene who figured that upward of a million dollars worth of jewels was passing in display before them at that moment.

But the rajah looked neither to the right nor to the left.

With that same stately demeanor which he had preserved ever since he entered the building, he followed his conductors through the length of the store, and finally into the reception room, where, after a few moments, Peyton Storms appeared, accompanied by two of the men he had mentioned in his conversation with Nick the preceding evening—Messrs. Krebs and Compton—and a moment later, Ralston, the head of the company's detective department, also appeared.

To Mr. Storms, Ten-Ichi preferred the same request he had made to the superintendent, adding:

"My master, the rajah, regrets that he is unable to make the request directly to you, sir; but, as he speaks no English, he begs that you will overlook the necessity for making me his mouthpiece."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Storms. "Make my compliments to the rajah, and assure him that I will be only too happy to exhibit the ruby in his honor."

The *modus operandi* of the showing of the ruby has already been explained, so it is unnecessary to go over the ground a second time.

The party was conducted to the safe-deposit vaults, the strong box and the steel casket were opened exactly as had been described to Nick, the gold box was taken from its resting place in the casket and conveyed to the room over the safe-deposit vaults, where the lid of the box was thrown back and the great ruby—that is, the imitation of it, of course—was displayed in its bed of white satin.

Through Ten-Ichi, as before, Nick asked that he might be permitted to take the ruby in his hand, and when permission was granted, he lifted it from its place and examined it with great care, giving expression as he did so to many exclamations of amazement and delight.

The exhibition was, however, soon over, and the ruby was conveyed back to the vaults, while the rajah and his servants waited in the company of Ralston for the return of Storms and Krebs.

When they did return, Ralston was dismissed, and Compton was sent back to his own department, so that only the detective, with his two assistants and the two members of the firm, remained in the room over the vaults.

"By Jove, Carter, but you are a crack-a-jack!" exclaimed Storms, as soon as they were at liberty to speak with frankness. "The devil himself could not have told that you and these two gentlemen here, whom I take to be your assistants, were not the real thing."

"Certainly not. What else would be the use for us to practice our profession?"

"Well, what have you found out?"

"I have discovered that somebody has been able to make an imitation ruby so perfectly that only a past-master expert could hope to detect the fraud."

"Humph! We knew that already."

"Did you expect me, from this exhibition, to smell out the whole affair in a moment?" asked Nick.

"Hardly."

"Well, Mr. Storms, I have discovered nothing so far, save that it seems highly probable that the ruby was stolen from its bed of white satin in your presence."

"In my presence!"

"Yes."

"That is absurd!"

"Not so absurd as you think."

"But when? And how?"

"Ah! That is another matter—quite."

"But the thing is impossible!"

"I don't think so."

"If the ruby was stolen while I was present, it was also in the presence of Krebs, Compton and Ralston."

"Quite so," said the detective, calmly. "You see, gentlemen, it is highly improbable that the thief could have gained access to your strong box and to the steel casket inside, past all the safeguards you have placed around them, although I will admit that with time and patience, expert assistance and collusion with a sufficient number

of employees, the thing might be accomplished; but you will agree with me that that view of it is even more absurd than the other."

"I should say," remarked Krebs, musingly, "that the two were about in the nature of a stand-off."

"Gentlemen," said the detective, "when a thief undertakes a 'job' he invariably studies every approach to his quarry a very long time before he commences operations; and when he does begin, he selects the easiest and most promising among those approaches."

"I will grant you that," assented Storms.

"Now, to make the attack upon the place where the ruby was kept would be manifestly the most difficult; and there is another objection to that method which is almost prohibitive; it exists in the fact that the purloiners of the ruby would be obliged to take too many individuals into their confidence. I am of the opinion that the ruby was stolen under your very eyes and noses—while you were looking on."

"But——" began Storms.

"Wait," interrupted Nick. "You told me that you keep a record of each time the ruby is exhibited. Oblige me by showing me that record."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RAPE OF "THE DEMON'S EYE."

When the book in which this especial record was kept was placed in the detective's hand, he opened it without a word, and passing it back to Mr. Storms, said:

"Oblige me now by making your entry for to-day, in my presence, exactly as you would have done it had the ruby been here to show, and if I were the genuine rajah of Saharanpore."

Storms took the book and moved across the room to a desk, while Nick followed and looked over his shoulder as he wrote.

The entry he made was as follows:

"Wednesday—then the date, which, for obvious reasons, is not given here.

"The rajah of Saharanpore, and two servants, at 10.30 A. M.

"The ruby exhibited to him in the presence of Storms, Compton, Krebs and Ralston.

"The rajah was permitted to take the ruby in his hands and examine it.

"The ruby was returned to the gold box by Storms.

"It was returned to the casket and the strong box by Storms, Krebs and Compton.

"The ceremony was ended at 11.03."

"There you are," he said, rising and returning the book to the detective. "You will find that all the entries are of the same character."

"Thank you," said Nick.

He took the book then, and returned to the seat he had formerly occupied, and began to turn the pages backward.

The first entry he came to was, of course, that one where the stone had been shown to Mr. Morgan and his friends; but this record did not show that the ruby had been removed from its satin bed in the gold box.

The next entry was that one of forty-five days previously, when the rajah of Bahmpoor had been shown the ruby; and here there was no statement that the ruby had been taken from the box. The name of Maitland Carruthers was mentioned as having brought the rajah to see the stone, and it was stated that it was shown to the foreigner at Carruthers' request.

"I suppose that these entries may be relied upon as entirely authentic?" asked Nick.

"Certainly," was the reply.

"Did the rajah of Bahmpoor make no request to examine the ruby more closely? To take it in his hand, in fact?"

"No; he was content to take the gold box in his hands and to examine the ruby without touching it."

"And Carruthers? What was he doing in the meantime?"

"Oh, he sat where you are seated now. He did not leave his chair. He has seen the ruby many times, as you will discover as you read back through the book."

"Ah! Then he has been in the habit of bringing people here to see it; eh?"

"You could scarcely call it a habit; but he has done so several times."

"How long a time has Carruthers been known to you, Mr. Storms?"

"Ten years."

"So your acquaintance with him began about the time of your interview with the London banker, when you heard the history of the stone?"

"Yes; just about that time."

The detective continued his examination of the book, and turned to the next entry back of the visit of the rajah.

"I find," he said, "that the next visit back of that of the rajah occurred exactly three months ago, and that Carruthers was present at that time. He brought with him then a person who is named here as Señor Don Manuel Llorente. Who was he?"

"Merely a prospective customer of Carruthers; at least, so he informed me."

"The name is Spanish; was he a Spaniard?"

"I think so; I am not sure. I am a better judge of jewels than of men."

"So I should suppose. Did this Llorente speak English?"

"No; Carruthers acted as interpreter for him."

"Should you say that it was Spanish they spoke together?"

It was Krebs who answered this question.

"I do not speak Spanish," he said, "but I have heard it spoken often enough to have an idea how it sounds, and I remember thinking at the time of that call that it was the queerest sounding Spanish I ever heard."

Nick turned to Ten-Ichi, and spoke rapidly to him in the Hindustanee tongue, and they exchanged several questions and replies. Then the detective turned to Krebs again.

"Did it sound anything like that?" he asked.

"Precisely. I remember that there was the same indrawing of the breath with the pronunciation of certain forms of sound, and——"

"Exactly. You have told me what I wish to know."

"Were you speaking Hindustanee with your assistant just now, Mr. Carter?"

"I was."

"Then it was certainly that language they talked. The man was a Hindu and not a Spaniard."

"Without doubt. Now, I find also, that this man Llorente, was permitted to handle the ruby. I wish to know how closely you watched him."

"Why, we all watched him, of course; Storms, Compton, Ralston and I. We did not take our eyes off him while he held the ruby in his hands."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Certainly I am sure of it."

"Stop and think a moment; and you, also, Storms. Something must have happened at that visit to distract your attention for an instant—an instant would have been long enough. Now, what did happen?"

Storms looked at Krebs and Krebs looked at Storms, but neither of the men replied.

"I see that something did happen at that time," said Nick, "and that each of you hesitates to speak about it. I can see it in your manner. Now, what was it? Did Carruthers, perhaps, tip over in his chair? I see that the arm of this chair in which I am seated has been badly wrenched, and that there is a bruise upon it. Is that what happened?"

"That is precisely what did happen, Carter," replied Storms, in a voice which was rendered positively husky from suppressed emotion.

"The accident occurred, did it not, at the very moment when the man who called himself Llorente was holding the ruby in his hand?"

"It did," said Krebs. "He was holding the stone up to the light, so that it was between him and that window yonder."

"And," continued Nick, "was he not at the same time holding a telescope with his other hand to exclude the light from his eyes while he examined the stone?"

"He was."

"That is the moment when your ruby was stolen, gentlemen," said the detective, quietly.

"But how is it possible?" exclaimed Storms. "I recall the circumstance perfectly; but I also know that, notwithstanding the accident to Carruthers and the chair, I did not take my eyes from the ruby for an instant."

"You think you did not," returned Nick, "but you did. A mere shifting of your eyes for the fraction of a second would have been sufficient for the work of that Hindu. He was prepared for you. The imitation ruby was in the palm of the hand he used as a telescope, and when the chair turned over with Carruthers the real ruby and the imitation changed places; that is all. He could have done it, too, with scarcely a perceptible motion of the hands."

"It seems incredible," muttered Storms.

"Have you no recollection of a statement always made by a prestidigitator when he begins a performance? Don't you remember that he invariably reminds you that the hand is quicker than the eye—and that he as invariably proves it? The sleight-of-hand men who go about the world giving exhibitions of their skill are usually Bohemians, but the jugglers and fakirs of India can give them cards and spades at the work."

The detective turned to Ten-Ichi.

"Show them how it was done, lad," he said. "Two half dollars will serve for the rubies. Here, we will put a blot of ink on the head side of one, and on the eagle side of the other. We will call the head the real stone and the other the imitation. Stand here, Ten-Ichi."

The Jap took his place where Nick indicated, accepted the two half dollars, and posed in about the position in which Llorente stood when he was examining the ruby.

"Now, gentlemen," said Nick, "watch him narrowly. Let nothing that may happen distract your attention. Remember that the coin in my assistant's right hand, between his thumb and finger, is the one with the blot of ink on the head side; the other coin you do not see at all, for it is in the palm of the other hand. Now watch him. Do not take your eyes off him."

Ten-Ichi stood with his right hand held a few inches above his eyes and with the left hand closed in the form of a telescope against one eye. Nick was still seated in the chair.

Storms and Krebs were each watching Ten-Ichi narrowly, each determined that he would be the one to discover when the change was made—if one were made at all.

And then Nick Carter, without warning of any kind, tipped over in his chair exactly as he believed Carruthers had done it.

Ten-Ichi did not seem to move at all, save to turn his head quickly as if to discover what had happened behind him.

Nobody there saw the slightest motion of his hands, and he turned his face calmly back to its original position and continued his inspection of the coin through the closed left hand.

Storms laughed outright, and Krebs grinned.

"Couldn't do it, could you?" exclaimed Storms.

"I'd have caught you that time if you had attempted the act," said Krebs, "for I expected Carter to do that very thing."

"Look at the coin in his right hand and see on which side the blot of ink is located," suggested the detective.

Ten-Ichi did not move, and Storms reached forward and took the coin from his right hand.

One glance at it was sufficient.

He gasped in amazement; he turned his blank countenance upon his associate in business, and then he sank into a chair, speechless.

Krebs seized the coin from him and also examined it.

The blot of ink was on the eagle side of the coin. The change had been made before their eyes, when each was positive that he had not lost a motion made by Ten-Ichi; but it had been made. There was no denying that.

"Are you convinced now when the ruby was stolen?" asked Nick.

"I am," said Krebs, solemnly.

"And I, also," assented Storms; "but I would not have believed it had it not been done right here in just the way it was done."

"Let me tell you something," said Nick. "That man who came here and posed as a Spaniard by the name of Llorente, was doubtless one of the greatest experts at sleight-of-hand in all India. Without a doubt he was as much more deft and expert in the art than Ten-Ichi is, as Ten-Ichi is more expert than you are, Storms. What chance did you have against such a man as that?"

"None whatever," assented Krebs.

"You are right. None whatever. Provided as he was with a duplicate in imitation which so exactly resembled the real stone that even Mr. Krebs did not notice the difference until he took it in his fingers to replace it on its bed of satin from which it had been disturbed, the exchange was as easy to him as it is for me to light this match;" and the detective struck a match against the side of a box he had taken from his pocket.

"Tell me this," exclaimed Storms. "If Carruthers was a party to that theft—as I am now convinced he was—why should he have returned here forty-five days ago to have the stone exhibited again? Nay, more, how did he dare to do it?"

"I will reply to both questions. He came in order to convince himself that you had not yet discovered your loss, and he did it out of pure bravado. Moreover, in a sense, he placed himself beyond the pale of suspicion by that act, for you, yourself, have sworn to me that it was the real ruby that was shown that day, and you could all swear that no person touched it that day. Don't you see? Carruthers did not exactly establish an alibi, but he did establish something very much like one."

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRACK OF "THE DEMON'S EYE."

"Carter, you are a wonder!" exclaimed Peyton Storms.

"Oh, no, I'm not," replied Nick, "it is Carruthers who is the wonder, for he has dared to plan and execute this thing for his employers, and he has had the coolness and the audacity to return here after it was accomplished, and practically to cover up his tracks so well that if he were arrested to-day and charged with the commission of this stupendous thing, there is not a court of law in the country where he could be convicted. Don't you see that, Mr. Storms?"

"I begin to see it."

"You would not have a leg to stand on if you should charge Carruthers with complicity in this affair. He could laugh at you, and he would laugh at you."

"Then what are we to do?"

"Wait; let me first show you just where you stand in regard to Carruthers. If I had not satisfied each of you two men that the ruby was stolen at the time of the visit of Llorente, you would each of you have sworn, on your most solemn oaths, that the ruby was here and safely cared for at the time of the visit of the rajah of Bahmpoor. Carruthers would, of course, testify that he has seen the ruby many times, and that it was the ruby he saw that day. The rajah would be prepared to testify—and doubtless he could prove the truth of it—that he is an expert in rubies, and he would swear that it was the real ruby he saw that day; for you may rest assured that he is a part of the conspiracy; and on top of all that you would have to admit, each of you, that not a finger touched the ruby that day. As they say in the South, 'Where would you be at?'"

Storms groaned; Krebs scowled, and Nick smiled.

"To repeat my question," said Storms, "what are we to do now?"

"We are," replied Nick, "to do the very best we can to recover possession of the ruby."

"But how?"

"I haven't quite determined that, as yet. Do you happen to know if Carruthers is still in the city?"

"I do not know, but I don't think he is."

"Do you know where he lives when he is in the city?"

"Yes; at the Maintenon, on upper Broadway."

"I know where it is. I think I will make a call there before I remove this disguise. And now I wish to give you gentlemen a few words of advice."

"What are they, Carter. I will promise in advance that it shall be followed."

"I want absolutely nothing said about the disappearance of the ruby. If application is made to you to exhibit it, no matter by whom, I want you to show the imitation with precisely the same precautions you have always used in regard to the real stone. It may take me a year to get on the track of 'The Demon's Eye,' but if

it takes five years, I don't want a word of the truth to get out during that time. The people who possess that ruby, as well as those who were instrumental in stealing it, must remain in ignorance of the fact that you have discovered the imposition that has been practiced upon you. Will you see to it that this is done? Both of you?"

"We will."

"And will you impress upon your associates in the directorate of the company, the importance of this advice?"

"We will. It shall all be done exactly as you direct."

"Very well. With that understanding I will take my leave now. There is nothing more for me to do here."

Five minutes later the rajah of Saharanpore, followed by his two attendants, walked out of the great establishment of Orloff & Co. as they had entered it, followed by the curious gaze of every person in the place.

"Lads," Nick said to them, after they had entered the carriage, and directions had been given to the coachman to drive them to the Maintenon, the largest apartment hotel in the city of New York, "we are going now to call upon Maitland Carruthers—and if we are fortunate enough to find him at home, you will each have your hands full to play your parts sufficiently well so that he will not penetrate the fact that a disguise has been resorted to."

"I think we can do it," said Ten-Ichi.

"So do I," replied the detective. "If I did not think so it is the very last place in the world where I would take you just at the present moment."

When they arrived at the Maintenon, Ten-Ichi, at Nick's request, entered the hotel to inquire for the man they wished to see, and, after a moment, he returned and announced that Carruthers was there, but that he was making preparations to leave.

With all the stateliness and haughtiness he had assumed during his call at Orloff's, the detective descended from the carriage, and entered the hotel, where he was shown to the reception room, and almost immediately thereafter Maitland Carruthers entered the room.

Nick Carter rose to meet him as he entered, and Carruthers stopped midway across the apartment, bowed with grave courtesy, motioned to Nick to be seated while he remained standing in an attitude of respectful attention.

He did not utter a word, and Nick was delighted at that, for it told him that thus far, at least, Carruthers had no idea that Nick was not what he appeared to be—an Indian rajah.

He knew, moreover, because of Carruthers' attitude, that the fellow possessed considerable knowledge of the manners and customs of high-caste Hindus, since it was one of the unwritten laws that, under circumstances such as were supposed to exist at the present moment, the rajah should be the first to break the silence, and Carruthers should not seat himself until he was bidden to do so by the Hindu.

Ten-Ichi, who had accompanied his master, remained near the door; Patsy was outside with the carriage.

"Will you be seated?" said the detective, in perfect Hindustanee; and Carruthers, with another bow, and a murmured "Thank you," in the same tongue and as perfectly spoken as Nick could do, acquiesced.

The card which the detective had caused to be sent to Carruthers bore the name of an utterly unpronounceable Indian name, and gave a number of titles, among which, of course, was that of the rajah of Saharanpore.

"You have perhaps never visited my realm in the Punjaub, on the slope of the Himalayas, sir?" Nick began, still, of course, speaking in the tongue of the country from which he was supposed to hail.

"No," replied Carruthers, "Saharanpore happens to be one of the few sections of India to which I have not penetrated. May I ask what service I can render you?"

"A very trifling one," murmured the detective. "We arrived in New York by rail, from the West, only this morning, and my first call, after reaching this city, was to view the wonderful ruby at the house of Orloff & Co. While there——"

"Did you see it?" interrupted Carruthers, with just the slightest show of eagerness.

The pseudo rajah shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, and with a slight smile hovering about his features, he said, slowly:

"I saw an exceedingly clever imitation of it. The real stone, I suppose, is kept hidden from the observation of chance visitors like myself. Is it not so?"

"It was not the genuine stone, then, that you saw?" asked Carruthers, with palpable anxiety in his voice.

"Certainly not. As I have stated, it was a most clever imitation."

"And did you inform Orloff & Co. that you had penetrated the fraud?"

The rajah raised his brows in questioning surprise, as he replied:

"My dear sir, I did not leave my courtesy in Saharanpore when I decided to travel through this country. It would have been but a poor return for their courtesy to me if I had permitted them to perceive that I saw through their little joke."

Carruthers threw back his head and laughed heartily; and it was a laugh of very evident relief, too; then, after a moment, he remarked:

"But you have not informed me how it happens that you have sought me out, here at this hotel."

"I was on the point of giving you that information when you interrupted me," replied the detective. "While I was there I asked, through my servant, if any of my countrymen had been permitted to view the ruby, and was informed that the rajah of Bahmpoor had lately been there in your company. The gentleman in charge was kind enough to give me your name and this address, and

I have ventured to call upon you, in the hope that I might find him here also; or, failing in that, that you could tell me where he could be found."

"He has returned to India," said Carruthers, rather shortly, Nick thought.

"Indeed! May I ask when that was?"

"He sailed by way of the Mediterranean service of the North German Lloyd and the P. & O. steamers for Bombay the day following our call at Orloff's."

"Indeed! I am sorry. Perhaps, sir, you may know of another of my countrymen who happens to be in this country at this time. I speak no English, and I find myself very lonely."

"I regret that I know of no one of your rank and caste who is at present in America," replied Carruthers, slowly; and then he added: "Do you anticipate remaining here for any length of time?"

"No," said Nick, "I think not. There is nothing—now—to keep me here. I shall probably sail by the first steamer, for Europe, and thence make my way slowly to my home again."

"I am sailing for Europe in the morning," said Carruthers. "If you cared to take the same steamer——"

"Indeed, nothing would please me more, sir. Would it be possible for me to secure passage by that steamer, for myself and servants?"

"Without a doubt. If you really care to take it, I will act as your commissioner and attend to the matter for you."

"Would you indeed be so kind?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

The detective's hand disappeared among the folds of his garments, and presently reappeared containing a huge roll of American money.

From the outside of this roll he detached a thousand-dollar bill, which he extended toward Carruthers.

"I have no idea of the cost," he said, "but I have no doubt that this will be sufficient to secure the accommodation until I arrive on board the steamer. I have with me a secretary and two servants. That is all, sir."

"And your baggage?"

"My servants will attend to that if you will write down for me the name of the steamer and the directions for finding it."

This was quickly accomplished, and a few moments later Nick was again in the carriage with his two assistants, driving rapidly toward the Waldorf.

"Patsy," he said, as soon as they had started, "I don't know whether Carruthers will be smart enough to have us followed or not, but it is more than likely that he will be. At all events, I don't propose to take any chances, so you will have to bear the burden of things for the balance of the day."

"I'm ready," replied Patsy, with a laugh of keen enjoyment.

"Personally, I must remain at the hotel, for Carruthers suggested that I go to the Waldorf, and it is more than likely that he will be poking his nose in there when least expected. I must be on hand to receive him if he does."

"Certainly."

"We will enter the hotel together. Ten-Ichi will secure the best suit of rooms in the hotel for our accommodation to-night, and we will go to our rooms. Then you, Patsy, must get out of your Indian clothes and find Chick without delay. Tell him what has been done to-day, and that we sail on the *Majestic* in the morning. It is up to him to arrange for the baggage and to have it sent to the steamer. He will need no directions for that. We have traveled in this costume before, and he will know exactly what to do and how to do it. When he has attended to everything, he must come to the hotel also, prepared to sail with us. Tell him that he is to act as my secretary, that his name is Simrha, and that he speaks English."

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE HEART OF INDIA.

There was no hitch in the arrangements as made by Carruthers, on the one hand, and by Chick, on the other, for the sailing of the rajah of Saharanpore by the *Majestic* the following morning.

Nick was correct in his surmise that Carruthers would call upon him at the hotel that evening; but the detective was there to receive him when he called, and as far as the detective could determine, Carruthers had no idea that the rajah was not all that he appeared to be.

The baggage which Chick supplied for the "rajah" would have passed muster anywhere, for it was made up from among the stock of trunks and bags which the detective always kept on hand for just such emergencies as this one.

Each piece bore the earmarks of constant and extended travel and long usage, and there were enough of them to have supplied a household, and had some to spare.

And so the *Majestic* sailed away with the Indian potentate and his servants, and with the man who had been chiefly instrumental in the stealing of "The Demon's Eye."

During the first three days of the voyage Nick kept himself secluded in his suit of rooms, declining even to receive Carruthers, who called constantly with words of sympathy for the rajah, whom he believed to be suffering from sea sickness.

But on the fourth day out, arrayed more gorgeously than ever, Nick appeared on deck, accompanied by his secretary, upon whose arm he leaned heavily.

Carruthers was quick to perceive him, and to rush forward with an offer of any service he could render.

"Is it your intention to return directly to India?" was one of the questions he asked; to which the detective replied that he had no such intention, but should remain for a few days in London, and then go to Paris for a fortnight.

"After that," he added, "my plans are uncertain. The purpose which took me to the United States has ceased to exist, I find, and now the time will be devoted to some sight-seeing."

"Did you go to America expressly to see 'The Demon's Eye'?" asked Carruthers, blandly.

Nick turned a sharp look toward the man, exactly as he would have done had he been the real rajah of Saharanpore, resentful of an impertinent question.

Carruthers hastened to repair the slip.

"Pardon me," he said. "The rajah of Bahmpoor visited the country for that purpose, and I did not know but that you were on the same errand which took him there."

"The rajah of Bahmpoor and the rajah of Saharanpore have many aspirations in common," replied Nick, with some touch of haughtiness in his tones. "It is possible that the wish to see 'The Demon's Eye' might be one of them. But," he added, with just a perceptible pause, "it was only a substitute that I saw. The real ruby was doubtless locked away where neither you nor I can ever see it."

Nothing more was said on that subject at the time, nor was it referred to again during the voyage.

At the Hotel Cecil, in London, to which place Carruthers conducted Nick and his retinue, the detective asked him:

"And what, may I ask, is your destination, Mr. Carruthers?"

There was a slight hesitation before the man replied, and a peculiar smile fluttered around the corners of his mouth when he did speak.

"Ultimately," he said then, "it is the same as your own."

"India?" exclaimed Nick, in seeming surprise.

"India," replied Carruthers. "It may happen, rajah, that we can make the journey in company. Like you, I have some matters to attend to which will keep me in London for a time; after that, I also shall be in Paris for a short stay, and, then again like you, I shall take the trail for Hindustan."

They parted after that, nor did the detective see Carruthers again during his stay in London; but this he purposely shortened, for he was convinced that he could do nothing there.

It must not be supposed, however, that he permitted Carruthers to go about without surveillance.

Nick was convinced that if he kept tab on Carruthers that ultimately he would lead him directly to "The Demon's Eye," and, therefore, he took every precaution not to lose sight of the man for a moment.

To this task Chick was assigned, and the assistant speedily got out of his disguise as secretary to the Indian nabob and arrayed himself in the habiliaments of what we term civilization, so that when Carruthers made his last call upon Nick—the one during which the conversation just referred to took place—Chick was patiently waiting outside the hotel to take up the trail the moment that Carruthers should reappear.

But although Chick pursued Carruthers indefatigably throughout their stay in the English capital, he discovered absolutely nothing which would aid them in their search for the great ruby.

Carruthers went nowhere where it was not perfectly proper that he should go; he saw nobody who by any possibility could be associated with the robbery at Orloff's, and he did nothing toward which the finger of criticism could be directed, even by so particular a censor as Nick Carter.

And so, after three days watching and shadowing, Nick Carter determined to pull up stakes and go to Paris, leaving Carruthers to his own devices until such time as he should select to make his appearance in Paris, and again make himself known to the rajah of Saharanpore.

But Nick Carter was getting tired of his character of the rajah.

He knew perfectly well that it would be impossible for him to carry out the deception in India, for the very good reason that there was a rajah of Saharanpore in that country, and the detective had not the least idea of the man's appearance, his habits or his associations.

Plainly, in entering the country of the Hindus he must adopt another character, and so he determined not to await his own arrival there before performing that miracle, but to make the change at once, and at the same time to make it appear that the rajah whom he represented had departed from Paris for his home.

In pursuance of this idea he sent Chick to Marseilles to engage passage on the steamer for the rajah and his suite, and it therefore happened that when the steamer sailed two days later, the books of the company showed that the nabob and his traveling companions were aboard.

They did leave Paris for Marseilles; they did register at a hotel at Marseilles, and they did depart from that hotel for the steamer; but they never appeared aboard of her.

Instead, the four detectives returned to Paris separately, and took up separate quarters there, to await the arrival of Carruthers from London.

The conduct of Carruthers in Paris after his arrival there, was much the same as it had been in London—without criticism.

It is true that to Nick—who never permitted him to get beyond the sight of one of his assistants or himself—he appeared somewhat surprised and deeply chagrined to

find that the rajah of Saharanpore had not waited for him.

But he seemed to be bent on pleasure only in the French capital; indeed, his conduct was that of one who waits impatiently for a certain time to pass before keeping an engagement, and Nick, therefore, decided that the man was due in India at a certain time, and was merely loitering on the way in order not to be ahead of his engagement.

But the time for departure came at last, and when the steamer which conveyed Carruthers to his destination passed through the Red Sea, stopped at Aden for an interval, and then plowed its way across the Arabian Sea toward Bombay, it carried also four other passengers, who were intensely interested in every move the man made, but yet who seemed not to know one another more intimately than fellow passengers on such a voyage might do.

And then—Bombay!

There are some places on the face of the earth that are hotter and more offensive than Bombay, but the writer has never chanced to discover one. In the upper part of the city, where the English club is located, life is endurable, and I have been told that it becomes really attractive at times—but that can only be when a pretty woman becomes the attraction; and there are many of them there.

But Carruthers did not go to the English club—that is, not at once; nor did he put up at any of the hotels usually sought by tourists.

Instead, he made his way, with the air of one who is familiar with the ground, to a small hotel on Sashthi Street, kept by a Frenchman of doubtful antecedents, who, nevertheless, had the reputation of preparing the best food to be found in India.

Nick Carter went with him, while the three assistants found other quarters in different parts of the city.

One thing that the detective had accomplished during the voyage from Marseilles was to find an opportunity to inspect the baggage of Carruthers while Chick kept him engaged on deck, and although he had discovered nothing of particular importance, he had succeeded in satisfying himself of the ultimate destination of Carruthers—a lesser city which nestles high up in the mountains of the State of Haiderabad in the Dekkan.

It happened that Nick was familiar with the locality, although ten years had passed since he had visited it, and so, inasmuch as he was posing as an English traveler who was in search of adventure only, and as it happened that the name of the small city where Carruthers was going, was Nadair, he chose to represent that his own destination was Godavari, which he knew to be located only a few miles distant from the larger place.

"It is a new section of India to me," Carruthers had admitted, when he discovered that the Englishman was bound for approximately the same locality. "I must confess that I do not now know how to get there."

"Then permit me to act as your guide, since our destinations are so near together," was Nick's reply. "I go to Godavari, which is only about ten miles from Nadair. It is a frightfully wild and mountainous country, and you would surely go astray without a competent person to guide you."

Carruthers jumped at the opportunity, and Nick continued, in order to prove that he knew what he was talking about:

"We travel by rail from Bombay to Sholapur—between five and six hundred miles—after which we take horse for between two or three hundred miles more. I have been over the route and know it well."

Thus it was arranged that they should travel together; and a few days later a remarkable coincidence happened.

Three other gentlemen, passengers on the same steamer, discovered, while they were talking together in the smoking room, that they were all going to the mountains of Haiderabad, and, although they appeared never to have met until they took passage on the same steamer, they were all miners from different parts of the world, who were on prospecting tours. One was from California—it was Chick, of course—another was from Australia—Patsy—and the third hailed from Guanajuato, in Mexico—Ten-Ichi.

Carruthers and Nick overheard them discussing the matter, for they talked in loud tones, and Carruthers watched them narrowly when they spread a map out before them on a table and bent over it in study.

Then, presently, the names of Naidar, Godavari, Ker, Patri, Valur and other places in the locality were mentioned, and Carruthers turned to Nick.

"Those men seem also to be traveling in our direction," he said.

"So it would appear, from their conversation," replied Nick, smiling indulgently. "I wish them joy in all the gold they will find in those mountains between Haiderabad and Berar. They should go further north if they are in search of gold."

"Why not tell them so?" suggested Carruthers.

"I will," was Nick's reply; and thus it happened that when, a week later, Carruthers took horse from Sholapur toward the mountain city of Nadair, he was accompanied by Nick Carter and his three assistants, Chick, Ten-Ichi and Patsy, and each one of the four had determined in his own mind that, when he returned to America, "The Demon's Eye" should accompany him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAGEDY OF GODIVARI CANYON.

For purposes of his own which are readily obvious, the detective appeared to attach himself rather more to

the three miners than to Carruthers during the ride to the mountains.

When they camped at night, their discussions around the fire were of mines and minerals, and, while they rode together during the day, the same exhaustless topic of conversation was indulged in, and so it happened that the three miners determined to be guided by their new friend, and to make their first stop at Godivari.

From these conversations, Carruthers held aloof.

More than once Nick Carter surprised a gleam in the eyes of Carruthers which made him uneasy lest long ago the wily villain had penetrated their disguises, and was playing as deep, if not a deeper, game than the detective himself.

But he dismissed these thoughts almost as soon as they appeared, attributing those glances to the man's natural caution and shrewdness.

Had he known—but he did not know, and the story must be told as it happened.

In due time they arrived at Godivari, just at nightfall, and Nick told Carruthers that, if he would wait there for a day's rest, he would ride across the mountain to Nadair with him.

This was agreed to, and so, the second morning after their arrival, the two set out together on their somewhat perilous ride through what, in our own great West, would be called a canyon, and there are no canyons in the Rocky Mountains more hazardous or more forbidding than this one proved to be.

It was cold, too, in the chill, morning air, and, as they ascended, it grew colder.

At noon they stopped to rest their horses and to eat their luncheon, and it was immediately after they had finished their repast that the most tragic incident in the life of Nick Carter took place.

The two men were seated on either side of the narrow pass, with their backs against the sheltering rocks.

Nick had lighted a cigar, and Carruthers was puffing complacently at a pipe, when suddenly he left his seat and crossed to where his horse was still munching at his feed.

From the holster of his saddle he removed a big forty-four Colt, and, with it in his grasp, he returned to his seat against the rock, remarking as he did so that he had discovered that there was something wrong about the action of the weapon, and that he might as well improve the time while they were resting in examining it.

For once in his life, Nick Carter was entirely off his guard.

He had not a suspicion in the world that Carruthers doubted his apparent identity, and so he smoked on in silence, until suddenly he was startled into complete consciousness by the cold and incisive tones of Carruthers, as he said, slowly:

"Lock your fingers together over the top of your head, Nick Carter, and keep them there until I tell you to take them down, or I will kill you as I would a snake!"

The muzzle of the Colt was pointed directly at the detective's heart; the hand that held it was as steady and unrelenting as fate, and the gleaming eyes behind it told Nick Carter all too well that there would be no compromising with this man.

He looked across the space between them, which did not exceed fifteen feet, and smiled into Carruthers' eyes, for there was a certain humor in the situation, despite its tragic aspect.

He had been so cocksure that this diamond thief did not know him—and now it would appear as if the man had known him from the very first, and that he had all the time been laughing in his sleeve at the efforts made by the detective and his assistants to play their several parts; but, as he looked across the space and smiled at his foe on the opposite side of the narrow pass, he also raised his hands, as he had been commanded to do, and locked his fingers together over the top of his head.

The muzzle of the weapon never wavered.

It was directed ominously toward the detective's heart all the time; and then, slowly, a cruel smile began to creep across the handsome face of Maitland Carruthers.

"Who do you think is the smarter man of the two now, Nick Carter?" he asked, after a pause which must have lasted two minutes.

"Well," replied Nick, also smiling, "just at the present moment I think that you would draw the blue ribbon, Carruthers."

"Did you think for a moment that you could fool a Carruthers?"

"I have fooled two of them in my time, and I did not hesitate to try it on with a third."

"Did you suppose that I was such an ass?"

"I have thought so for something approaching three months."

"Why, Carter, I knew you from the moment you came to call upon me at the Maintenon, in New York."

"I am beginning to realize now that you did."

"There has not been a moment when I have not known who you were. And your three friends, forsooth! Great Scott, Carter, what an insufferable ass you must have thought me!"

"I merely cast you in the part to which thieves are usually assigned," drawled Nick, languidly.

"Be careful, Carter! I might pull this trigger if that tongue of yours wags too freely!"

"I suppose you mean to pull it anyhow, when you have enjoyed your triumph long enough to please you, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. I do not intend that you shall ever leave this canyon alive."

"That is rather unkind of you, isn't it?"

"Bah! Did you suppose, Carter, that I did not know my way up here? I have been through this same canyon half a dozen times in the last ten years. The rajah of Bahmpoor is also the rajah of Matarapur, Carter. Do you happen to know where that is?"

"Yes; it is a tract of valley land of about seventy thousand acres, between the mountains of Haiderabad and the mountains of Barar. It is said that foreigners who go there do not return," replied Nick.

Carruthers laughed aloud.

"I have been there—more than once—and I have returned," he said. "I am going there again, and——"

"And this time you will not return," interrupted the detective.

"Oh, yes, I will; but you will not."

"Listen, Carruthers," said Nick, "you are a fool to go there, now that the rajah has no further use for you. He has the ruby, and do you suppose that when you, who assisted him to obtain it, are once in his power in his own bailiwick, that he will permit you ever to see the haunts of civilization again?"

"Bah!" said Carruthers.

"May I remove my cigar from my mouth?" asked Nick.

"No; if you move your hands, I will kill you where you are! Drop the cigar to the ground, if you are through with it. Would you like to know, Carter, how it was that I penetrated your disguise?"

"Yes, I would."

"It was very simply done, and, if you had used your usual sagacity in the beginning of this affair, you would never have been discovered, for you played the part all right."

"I suppose I might thank you for that."

"I am not paying compliments; I am only telling you of one time when you lost your usual caution."

"Well?"

"After the ruby was taken, a watch was placed on Storms and on Krebs, for I wished to be informed of the very first moment when they discovered that 'The Demon's Eye' had disappeared. That watch never left either of them for a moment, and, therefore, when you went to the house of Peyton Storms, shortly after midnight one night, without disguise, you were seen and recognized, and the fact was reported to me.

"It was not difficult after that to connect you with the Indian nabob who called at Orloff's the following day to see the ruby, and, when you went directly from there to see me, the suspicion became a surety.

"You were also somewhat too eager to travel with me on the same steamer to Europe; don't you think so?"

"I do now. I can see several things where I erred—now."

Nick was purposely playing the rôle of utter chagrin, and at the same time he was watching Carruthers narrowly, hoping that there would come an instant when the man would be off his guard, and determined to avail himself of it, if such a moment should arrive.

"So, you see, I knew who you were from the beginning," continued Carruthers, not abating in the least his wariness, and still holding the revolver, which now rested on his knee, so that the muzzle was aimed directly at the detective's heart.

"Yes; so I see," muttered Nick.

"I have a long score to settle with you, Carter. Be careful of those hands of yours; they seem to be uneasy."

"I think they are going to sleep," said Nick, smiling.

"They will go to sleep presently—for all time!" was the grim reply; "when I am through with you. I have a long score to settle with you, Carter."

"You said that once before."

"You never once heard of me until this affair of the ruby, did you?"

"No; I can't say that I ever did."

"You did not know that there were three brothers of us, did you?"

"No."

"Livingstone Carruthers and I were twins; the other brother was younger. I have passed almost my entire life here in India. That is why I speak the language so perfectly, and it is also the reason why I have never run afoul of you before now."

"It is a pity that you did not remain here," drawled Nick.

"Yes, it is a pity—on your account."

"Might I ask, Carruthers, how long this tableau is to continue?"

"Are you in a hurry to die?"

"No; but I am anxious to take down my hands. They are getting numb."

"I will relieve you in a moment, Carter," said Carruthers, with grim suggestiveness in his tone. "Do you know that just beyond the next turn in the canyon there is a place where the trail goes along the sheer side of the precipice, and that from it to the bottom of the cleft it is a sheer fall of more than a thousand feet?"

"Yes; I remember the place."

"That place is to be your grave, Carter," he continued, with terrible meaning. "I am going to shoot you now; I am going to kill you, deliberately and with a thrill of pleasure in the act, because you were the cause of the death of both of my brothers. I have led you on to this place, enticed you here to this spot, for that distinct purpose, and I have had more joy in the accomplishment of it all than I ever have hoped to experience in this life."

He paused an instant, and then continued:

"The term of your life is now counted by seconds, Carter, for I must get on my way," and his eyes blazed into Nick's across the narrow space between them.

The detective knew that he meant what he said, and he resolved in that instant to make an effort to live, at least.

With a motion so quick and so sudden that only Nick Carter could have accomplished it, he leaped from the rock against which he was leaning, and, as he leaped, he threw himself to one side, in the hope of avoiding the bullet which must surely follow his act.

But, quick as he was, he was not quick enough.

The instant he moved, Carruthers pulled the trigger of his weapon.

The loud report that followed echoed and re-echoed up and down the canyon, sounding more than thrice loudly in that altitude; and, as the flash and the report came, almost in the face of the detective, he staggered backward against the rock again, stood there, swaying, for a mere instant of time, and then he pitched forward on his face on the rocky roadway of the pass.

He did not move from where he fell, and, after a slight tremor which passed through his body and limbs, he lay quite still, while a tiny stream of blood trickled away along the trail from beneath him.

Carruthers, after he fired the shot, remained for several moments where he was seated, without moving, and the grim smile never once left his face.

He was assured in his own mind that he had killed the detective, and yet he was resolved to take no chances, and so he sat there, with the weapon still pointed at Nick, prepared to fire a second time, if the detective should make the least move, to indicate that life was not extinct.

But Nick Carter made no such move.

Save for that tremor through his body after he fell, he showed no sign of life whatever, and, when Carruthers had watched him for almost half an hour, he became satisfied that the detective was dead.

At last he dropped the revolver into one of his pockets, and, rising, he crossed to the spot where Nick had fallen, and turned the body over on its back.

To all appearance, Nick Carter was dead, and, after regarding him for a moment in silence, Carruthers turned away, with an expression of disgust upon his handsome face.

But he turned back again after a moment, and proceeded, in true highwayman style, to "go through" the detective's pockets.

Thus he relieved him of his weapons, his watch and of such other valuables as he found upon him—but there was very little money, and the robber muttered, in disgust:

"He left his funds with one of his assistants, I suppose. Oh, well, never mind; I will get my claws on it later. He must have had at least twenty thousand dollars with him, and a letter of credit for as much more."

Carruthers' next act was to lift the body from the ground, to carry it to the horse that Nick had rode that day and to lay it across the saddle, where it hung like a bag of grain which one carries to the mill to be ground; then, taking the two horses by the bridles, he led them slowly up the canyon, while ever and anon he put out a hand to steady the body of the detective, in order to prevent it from slipping from the horse's back.

They continued on a hundred rods or more in this manner, until they arrived at the place which Carruthers had described; the place where the trail passed along the side of the canyon, while the canyon itself sank into unknown depths in the earth.

Here he paused, and, clinging to the bridle of his horse, attempted to peer down into the black depths beneath him.

But he drew back, with a shudder, even before he had looked, for the place was awful in its sublimity, in its cavernous depth and in its loneliness.

"B-r-r-r!" he muttered, and for the space of a minute he stood there on the brink of the chasm, trembling.

Then, rousing himself, he lifted the body of the detective from the saddle, carried it to the very edge of the precipice, and then, closing his eyes, he hurled it over into the awful depths below.

And then, with a bound, he vaulted into the saddle, and, leaving the other horse to follow as it would, he dashed away up the trail at a gallop.

CHAPTER VIII.

INDORE, THE HIGH PRIEST.

It seems almost impossible that a man could live through the terrible times which followed upon the tragedy of Godivari Canyon—and yet Nick Carter did live, as we all know, for he is very much alive and as well and strong as ever to-day.

When he opened his eyes to consciousness, after the events described in the preceding chapter, it was to peer into the eyes of another man.

Strangely brilliant and piercing eyes they were, too, notwithstanding that they were the eyes of a very old man—of a man so old that it seemed to Nick when, later, he had partially recovered and had an opportunity to study him carefully, that he must, perforce, count his years by decades, instead of after the usual manner.

A man so old that his skin had become like parchment; so old that the furrows in his countenance were like crevasses in a mountain side; so old that one almost breathed antiquity in his presence; so old that the history of the dark ages seemed to hover about him like a garment, old—save for his eyes.

And they were as young, as full of force and energy and throbbing life as they had been in his youth, apparently, for they shone and sparkled like a boy's.

And what eyes they were!

Great, round, black eyes, which spoke of profound intelligence as with a voice.

And when the man spoke, lo! there was another revelation, for the voice he used was as rich and full and resonant as the baritone at an opera.

And when he strode across the floor of the cavern—for it was a cavern in which Nick Carter waked to life again—it was not with the feeble, tottering steps of a decrepit old man, but with the strides of a youth, of an athlete.

There was power in his muscles, too, as well as in his eyes and voice, and Nick, while he observed him during the weary days and weeks which followed while he lay helpless in the cavern, marveled at the old man, who was old only in face and feature, but who was young in all else.

Later, while Nick was recovering from the effects of his wound, ministered to by the old man of the mountain, who possessed some wonderful remedies, which acted like magic on the strong and healthy constitution of the detective—later, when the old man discovered that his patient could talk with him in his own tongue, he told him how it came about that he was rescued from certain death and was brought to the cavern to be restored to life.

"For," said the old man, "the Prophet of All Wisdom told me that your time to pass on to the higher life was not yet come; that it was meet that I should save you, and restore you to the destiny for which you were created; and so, my son, I have labored with you, and you will live."

When Nick had recovered sufficiently to be moved, it was the habit of the old man to lift him in his strong arms during the early hours of the morning, when the sun poured its rays through the mouth of the cavern, and to carry him out upon the ledge of rocks, which served as a veranda for the occupants of the cavern, and which extended fifty feet or more out over the almost bottomless gulf beneath them.

And then it was that Nick discovered how he had been saved from certain death.

Clinging, trailing vines grew in abundance along the sheer sides of the canyon, above the ledge of rock and below it.

Stout and tough of fiber, these vines had caught and sustained his senseless body when it was hurled from the pass above by Maitland Carruthers, and, although his weight had torn them loose and he had continued to fall, they had so nearly sustained him that, ultimately, he had fallen at the feet of the old man, who was resting in front of his cavern on the ledge, almost as gently as if he had been placed there by human hands.

Brought to the old man in the manner he was, it had appeared almost as if the hand of God had reached out to sustain and save the detective from death—at least, the old man so regarded it, and he immediately took upon himself the duty of restoring his strange patient to life.

No other than he might have performed that service for Nick Carter, for the bullet with which he was stricken had done its work well.

But the old man of the mountain possessed wonderful remedies of remarkable healing powers. His fame was celebrated through all that part of India, and so he brought Nick Carter back to life again.

But there were days and weeks, and even months, that elapsed before the detective felt that he was himself again, and, until he was entirely recovered, the old man refused absolutely to show him the way to the outside world.

Once, when his physician and friend was absent, Nick sought to discover the way out for himself, but he ended by giving it up in disgust, for, with all his talents and ability, the means of entrance and agress to and from the cavern was so perfectly concealed that it remained a secret even from the unquestioned skill of Nick Carter.

Three months he remained there, and never did Nick Carter pass three months so wisely and so profitably.

In the language of his own country, the old man was know as the high priest of Godivari, and he went by the name of Indore.

Long locks of snowy white hair fell upon his shoulders, while a beard of the same snowy whiteness covered his face to the cheek bones. In stature, he was not above Nick Carter's height, and in frame he was not more brawny; but he was a wonderful old man, with a wonderful record, and he had lived through so many years that once, when Nick asked him his age, he replied:

"My son, when I was born the men of England had not yet begun to subdue my countrymen; when I was brought into the world, men who have since died of old age had not yet been born; when the breath of life was infused into my body, there were only a few of us who knew that a world peopled by different races of men lived and died beyond our own borders. I am very old, my son—very old—and my time to go has almost come."

He hesitated a moment, and then continued:

"Sometimes—especially since I have been nursing you back to life—I can hear that far-off voice calling to me, and telling me that my time has almost come; and I shall be overjoyed when it does come; I have waited so long—so long."

"Do you mean that you wish to die?" asked Nick.

"To die? To die, my son? There is no such thing for me. I will simply lay aside this old habitation of mine and depart from it as I left the cavern but yesterday—and I would go home, to rest, to prayer, to the seat of all wisdom and learning. Do you wonder that I wish to go? I, who have waited so long a time?"

"No," said Nick; "I do not wonder."

"The time is almost here. The voice tells me so, and I am glad; and I am certain, my son, that you were sent to me as a comfort and solace in the last hours I shall pass in these solitudes."

During the time of Nick's convalescence they became more intimate. The detective became the pupil of Indore, and there were days and weeks when he literally sat at the feet of the wise, old man, absorbing the lore of which no other priest in India possessed so much.

And so, although the detective was anxious to go as soon as he was well enough to travel, Indore kept him there, in one sense a prisoner, but in the true sense as a patient and pupil, for with every day Nick learned more and more of the secrets of the adepts of India.

When he realized how much time had elapsed since the bullet from Carruthers' pistol had crashed through his body, he knew that, whatever danger had threatened his assistants at that time, must have long since fallen.

He remembered, of course, that Carruthers was as well aware of their identities as he had been of his own, and he knew that the fellow would not long remain inactive in getting them put out of the way after he had disposed of Nick Carter.

But he knew that each of his assistants was resourceful, and he hoped, almost against hope, that they had managed to elude the vigilance and the vengeance of Carruthers.

Once, and only once, he spoke with Indore about them; but the old man interrupted him with a gesture.

"Let not the outside world or its concerns penetrate to this cavern now, oh, my son," he said. "That which is to be, will be; that which has been, is past. Of your friends I know nothing; of yourself, I know much, and it not written that you shall suffer through the losses you dread. Be at peace until the time is ripe for your departure; be at peace, I say, and wait with patience, for I say unto you that it shall not be that you go from here until it is the will of the Prophet of All Wisdom; and it shall not be that you go hence until I go, also, although we do not take the same road. Where I go you may not penetrate, but from that place where I shall tarry I may return. Have no fear, my son. All will be well."

Nick was obliged to be content with this.

He understood now that the old man, Indore, believed that he was soon to die, and that he had determined to keep his pupil with him until that thing should come to pass.

And so Nick waited—impatiently at times, when he thought of all he should be doing outside that cavern; but at other times with infinite tenderness and patience, too, for he knew that his presence and companionship was a solace and a comfort to the man who had saved his life. Surely, it was a small thing to do for him in return for that service, to tarry with him for a while.

And the end came sooner than Nick had dared to hope.

Do not suppose that he hoped for the death of Indore; far from that; but he did wish constantly to be free to go in search of Chick, of Patsy and Ten-Ichi.

"The Demon's Eye" had all but faded from his memory during these weeks, but now, when he thought of the peril in which his assistants might be placed, of their probable death already at the hands of Carruthers, or of the rajah of Matarapur, the cause of his presence in far-away India, returned to him in full force, and he mentally resolved that, come what might, he would, at least, carry the Orloff ruby back to America with him when he returned.

It was on the morning of the day set apart each week by Indore for ceaseless prayer when Nick realized that a change was approaching.

Usually this day had been passed in utter silence between them, no word being spoken from one to the other between the rising and the setting of the sun.

But on this particular morning Indore did not go to his devotions, as usual.

Instead, he passed out upon the ledge over the chasm in the earth, and stood there for a long time, gazing into the blazing face of the sun with unflinching eyes.

Nick watched him, and saw that his lips moved, as if he were praying.

He did not kneel, as a devout catholic, or even a sun worshiper, would have done; but he stood upright, with raised head and glorified face, while his white hair and beard waved in the soft breeze that whispered in countless tones through the cavernous canyon.

At last, when the sun was high, so that it presently would pass beyond the border of the cliffs and would no longer shed its rays upon the ledge, Indore turned, and, in a low, resonant voice, called to Nick.

"Come hither, my son," he said; and as Nick approached him, he raised both hands in the gesture of bestowing a benediction.

"The hour draws near, my son," he said, solemnly. "When the sun has gone to rest behind the hills, and darkness shall have fallen over this portion of the world, my burdens will be laid aside and this wornout body will have lost its usefulness. Listen well, therefore, to what I have to say to you."

Nick remained silent, and, after a pause, the old man continued:

"Presently I will show you the way out of the cavern, and, when I have departed on that journey to the seat of all wisdom, you will go from here.

"When you have reached the pass from which you were thrown when you were so sorely injured, you will turn to the north and you will travel many leagues to the little principality of Matarapur.

"Destiny calls you thither, my son, and, that you may fulfill it, do as I shall command.

"When life shall have left this body of mine, take from it the white locks of hair, the long beard and the sandals and the robes it now wears. Array yourself in them. In my chest there are many things which will aid you in your preparations, so make no objection to use them, for, when I am gone, all that is here will belong to you—even this poor body and the name of Indore. You have been an apt pupil, my son, and I do not hesitate to lend you my identity. Remember."

CHAPTER IX.

THE CURSE OF "THE DEMON'S EYE."

At the palace of the rajah of Matarapur.

An immense structure in point of extent, though only two stories in height, since there were frequent and terrible earthquakes in that region, and it was not safe to build higher.

An imposing structure, nevertheless, covering a wide area of ground and built of a kind of stone so white that from a distance it shone like polished marble in the rays of the sun.

At the palace were gathered the friends and relatives of the rajah from far and near; and there were also his retainers, his followers and his people—the people over whom he ruled with a sway that was absolute.

There had been thirty days of rejoicing; thirty days of what would have been called a durban if it were further south in India, or further north or east or west; but here it was called by a different name—a name which can only be translated into English as "The Demon's Feast."

And still, this expression must not be misunderstood.

In Matarapur two kinds of demons were recognized—good demons and bad demons—and this was the feast of the good demons.

From far and near, I say, the host had gathered for this season of rejoicing, and the cause of it all was the restoration to the rajah of Matarapur of that priceless ruby, "The Demon's Eye."

Already, as has been said, there had been thirty days of festivity, and there were still to be thirty days more; and thousands of people had gathered there for the event.

Picture, if you can, a wide plain, lying almost flat before the palace, and extending for miles in either direction, to the right and to the left, while it stretched out a full league directly in front of the palace doors.

Imagine this plain dotted with tents of silk and tents of muslin, and tents of linen, offering every shade of the rainbow to the eye of the observer.

Imagine the spaces and the avenues between these tents, which were grouped according to color and texture in the form of villages, filled with swarming humanity arrayed in colors as gaudy as the different hues of their abiding places.

With all this in your mind's eye, you have a picture of the scene which greeted Nick Carter when he turned from the trail upon the plain and came to a full stop, forgetful for the moment that he had left his own personality behind him and that he was now Indore, the high priest of Godivari.

For a long time he stood there gazing, almost spellbound by the spectacle; and then he moved onward, slowly, toward the palace.

As he went forward, first one and then another saw him; and those who saw him fell upon their faces until he had raised his two hands in the form of a benediction and passed on, when in each case they rose and followed, shouting:

"Indore, the priest!"

"Indore, the wise!"

"Indore, the good!"

"Indore, the healer!"

"Indore! Indore! Indore!"

And this continued throughout that journey of a league from the edge of the plain to the palace entrance.

And, while he proceeded, the crowd was constantly augmented, until there were hundreds and finally thousands in his train, following humbly after.

And so he approached the steps of the palace, where a wide platform had been erected, and whereon were seated, beneath silken canopies, the rajah and his family and immediate followers.

These, also, to Nick's amazement, rose and prostrated themselves at his approach, until he had conferred that silent form of benediction, and Nick noticed that prominent among those who were in the rajah's party was Maitland Carruthers, as debonair, as handsome, as insolent and as self-satisfied as ever.

As he drew nearer to the platform, servants hastily descended from it and spread out upon the already carpeted steps, a covering of white silk for him to tread

upon; but, ere his foot had touched it, he paused and waved it aside, with a gesture of impatience.

Slowly it was removed, and then, as Nick mounted the platform, the rajah, with evidences of personal fear in his demeanor, came forward and got down upon one knee before him.

"In what have I merited your displeasure, O priest?" he murmured.

But Nick did not reply to him.

He would have done so, but at that moment his eyes traveled over the heads of those immediately in front of him, and his gaze encountered another pair of eyes that were looking into his with an expression so beseeching, so alluring and so pathetic that, instead of replying to the question of the rajah, he stretched out his right hand toward the girl, and said, so that his voice would reach her:

"Come hither, daughter."

The young girl, magnificent in her wondrous beauty and literally gowned in countless gems, so that in the sunlight they were dazzling to the eye, rose obediently and came forward, with rapid steps, and she would have prostrated herself at the feet of the supposed priest had not Nick put forth a restraining hand and held her.

"Nay, daughter," he said; "thy purity is as great as ever was Indore's. Stand here beside me. Now, tell me wherefore thy grief, and why hast thou called me from my cavern in the Godivari? Speak, daughter, and fear not."

"Father!" she cried out, falling to her knees in spite of Nick's effort to restrain her. "I have been brought here against my will. I am told that my mother was the last of the family that has reigned in Matarapur for many centuries, and that I must wed with this man, who is still a suppliant before thee, who now claims to be rajah of Matarapur, as well as of Bahmpoor."

"And what further, daughter?" asked Nick.

"I was abducted from the city of London, where I have lived since I was born, although I now speak to you in the tongue of my ancestors, which was taught to me by my mother."

"What more?"

"I was taken as a prisoner aboard a yacht, which sailed away at once, and I knew nothing of the identity of my captors or of my destination until we were landed at Kawar, from whence I was conducted to this place."

"What more, daughter?"

"Good father, my mother had so often described her home in India to me that I knew at once to what place I had been brought, but I knew nothing of the fate that was intended for me—marriage with this man."

"What more?"

"Away yonder, father, from whence I came, many thousands of leagues from this palace of the rajahs of Matarapur, there lives one whom I love and would wed. To him my promise has been given. Father, if it be possible, save me! save me! There are yet thirty days before this hateful marriage here can be celebrated. Save me, father, from this awful fate!"

"Thine age, daughter?"

"I am eighteen."

"I knew they mother when she was of thine own age, and her father, and her father's father, and his father, also, many generations back into the forgotten past. But thou art an alien, my daughter."

"My father was an Englishman."

"Ay, I know it. The curse of the foreigner lives in thy veins; but thou—thou art thyself as pure as the dew of early morning."

"Save me, father!" she cried, at that.

"Be at peace, my daughter. Go now; I would talk with the rajah of Bahmpoor, he who kneels at my feet."

She turned away, returning at once to her former position; and, when she had gone, Nick addressed the rajah.

"Rise, Jaharanzubar, rajah of Bahmpoor!" he said, and the half-prostrate rajah got slowly upon his feet.

"Since when, O Jaharanzubar, have you inherited the realm of the rajahs of Matarajur?" asked Nick, in the most threatening tones he had ever heard the real Indore use.

There was a scowl—an ugly scowl—upon the face of the rajah now, and it was plain that he did not intend to be coerced by a mere mountain priest, if there was anything he could do to avoid it.

"The lands, the palace and the title descend to me by the right of succession," he replied, insolently. "I am nearest of kin to the dead rajah, who was the last of his race."

"And you would make that right of succession still stronger by allying yourself in marriage to yon girl, who, by your own words to me, has some of the same blood in

her veins that flows in yours? Know you not that such a marriage is forbidden, Jaharanzubar?"

The rajah made no reply, and, after waiting a moment, the pseudo priest commanded:

"Answer me!"

"Ay; I know it; but in this case, priest, the relationship is so remote, the——"

"Know you that foreign blood courses in her veins, as well?"

"Ay, priest, I know it."

"Know ye not that you transgress all the laws of your fathers by wedding with her, and that you would be accursed if you should do it? Know ye not that you would become a pariah among your fellows?"

"No; I do not know it. The time is past for such fol de rol, priest, and I will not have it so!" cried the rajah, boldly. "Listen. Yonder in the palace is 'The Demon's Eye,' which, by my own efforts and at my own expense, I have found and restored to Matarapur. Have I not earned the right to Matarapur by that act alone? Answer me that, priest."

"Ay, perhaps; if you have it; go ye and get it. Let my eyes behold it. Go!"

The rajah turned and strode hastily into the palace, and, after an absence of many minutes, during which absolute silence reigned throughout that great crowd, he returned, bearing in his hands a jeweled box.

He made his way straight to the supposed priest, and, again falling upon one knee, he threw back the lid of the box, with a dramatic gesture.

"Behold it!" he exclaimed.

And thus it was that Nick Carter, for the first time, beheld "The Demon's Eye."

And then it was that a sudden inspiration came to him, also.

He turned from the ruby and faced the multitude that was gathered on the plain in front of the palace, and he raised his hands in that gesture of benediction he already so often used, and which was precisely the same gesture that he had seen Indore make use of in the cavern of Godivari.

And the people, one and all, from front to rear and from one side of the throng to the other, fell upon their knees and bowed their heads.

Turning, then, slowly, after the manner of a dervish, only much more slowly, he saw the people on the platform also bow their heads and fall upon their knees.

Then, in a clear baritone, so like the voice of Indore that none could detect the difference, he chanted a hymn of prayer that he had often heard Indore sing in the cavern, all the while making passes over the casket in which the ruby was contained.

Lower and lower dropped his hands while he made the passes, until suddenly he closed the lid of the jeweled casket with a snap, turned the golden key that was used to lock it, withdrew the key and held it aloft, where all could see it, if they raised their heads.

"Rise!" he shouted then. "Rise and sing with Indore!" and his voice reached far out on the plain.

And the multitude and the people on the raised platform rose to their feet.

Again he began chanting that hymn of prayer, and, after a moment of hushed silence, his own voice was joined by thousands of others, until the chorus sounded like the distant roll of harmonious thunder.

When the chant was ended, a hush, like the stillness of death, succeeded it, and for more than a moment nobody moved at all.

"Rise, Jaharanzubar," commanded Nick, at last, and the rajah got upon his feet, still holding the jeweled casket in his hands.

He discovered then that the casket was closed and locked, and that the priest was standing before him, with the golden key which locked the casket extended toward him.

"Jaharanzubar, rajah of Bahmpoor and of Matarapur," he said, slowly and impressively, "the blessings which go with 'The Demon's Eye' shall be changed to curses for you and yours if ye heed not what I say to you now."

"I will heed you and obey you, priest," was the sullen response, "since by your words you call me rajah of Matarapur. I will heed and obey you."

"Listen, then!"

"I listen."

"Thou shalt wed only with one who has no taint of foreign blood in her veins."

"I will obey."

"Thou shalt wed with such an one at the expiration of the celebration of the Demon's Feast."

"I will obey, if such an one can be found."

"Thou shalt turn all foreigners from thy lands, and entertain none such after the expiration of this feast, during the first ten years of thy reign."

"I will obey."

"Thou shalt shed no blood. If there be those who have offended thee, thou shalt forgive them for the space of ten years."

"I will obey, O priest."

"Thou shalt not look upon 'The Demon's Eye' again until the day when thou art wed; nor shalt thou permit another to do so. If thou shouldst fail in any one of these, my directions to you, the blessings which go with the possession of 'The Demon's Eye' shall be changed to curses for thee and thine throughout all time. Thou shalt bleed at the lungs, and die so. Thou shalt suffer with diseases which will render thee an outcast, and thou wilt live in torture unending after death."

"I will obey! I will obey!"

"Here is the key to the casket. Take it, but have brought to me now ribbons and a seal, with wax, so that I may put temptation out of thy way."

Presently, when the ribbons and the wax were brought, Nick wrapped the ribbons many times around the casket, and then, in many places, fastened them to it, as well as together with the wax and the seal.

During all this ceremony, which he had carried out so solemnly, he had seen a sneer upon the countenance of Carruthers, but he paid no heed to it, for he knew that the sneer arose only from his utter disbelief in the mummery.

And now, as the rajah turned away to return the casket to its place of security in the palace, Nick turned toward the girl who had besought his help.

"Daughter," he said, "I would speak with thee. Come hither."

CHAPTER X.

A PLOT WITHIN A PLOT.

As soon as she approached him, he drew her aside, so that they stood just beyond the hearing of others, provided they conversed in low tones, although Nick was particular to frame his first two questions in a tone which was just sufficiently loud for those who were nearest to them to overhear.

"Daughter," he said, "thy name?"

"I am called Nadja," she replied. "My father's name was Covington."

"And thy religious belief, daughter?"

"I am a Christian, sir," she replied, proudly.

Nick raised both hands in evident protest, but it was then that he permitted his voice to sink so low that none near them could hear; and then he said, still in Hindustanee:

"I am about to speak with thee in the English tongue, and thou art not to evince surprise at all, or to show in any way that we are conversing other than in the manner in which we began. If, while we talk, others should draw near to us, we will immediately resume the tongue and tone we are using now, and will speak of thy mother, so that all who hear may believe that we are discussing her. Am I understood, daughter?"

"You are," she replied; and, in spite of the effort she used, she could not entirely conceal the surprise she felt.

"I am going to place my life in your hands," said Nick, in English, then; "and, in return for such assistance as you shall give me, I will rescue you from this place and return you in safety to your home in England, and to the arms of the man you love. Is it a bargain? And have you the courage to act with me?"

"Yes—oh, yes. I have. Who are you, sir?"

"Never mind that just now. Do you know if there are other foreigners here besides that man who sat near to you when I arrived?"

"Yes. There are three. They are prisoners."

"Thank God that they are alive! Are they well, or ill?"

"I do not know. I think they are not ill."

"Where are they confined?"

"In the garden of the poison plants."

"The garden of the poison plants? Where is that, and what is it?"

"It is the middle court of the palace. In the very center of the garden is a pagoda, which is open at the top; but for that fact the prisoners would be killed by the poison perfumes of the garden in a single day, or night; and they give out more poison in the night than during the day."

"But what is it? What is this garden of the poison plants?"

"Have you not heard? Do you not know?"

"If I did know, I would not need to ask."

"For many generations the rajahs of Matarapur have attended that garden. It has descended from father to son, with the secrets concerning it, from time beyond the memory of man. All that I can tell you about it is that it is a creation of deadly plants, rendered so by the devilish art of man—of my forefathers.

"To enter that garden without adequate protection from the deadly perfumes means death. One may not traverse a dozen yards before falling in a swoon, and, unless one is removed at once, death follows in a few moments."

"How, then, are the prisoners given food and drink?"

"There is an attendant in the garden, who has lived there all his life. He was placed there when he was a child, after having been innoculated with the poisons. He was reared on those poisons, and cannot now live elsewhere. It was one of my grandfather's terrible experiments. I have heard my mother tell about it often."

"And this man conveys food and drink to the prisoners?"

"Yes; although there are times when the rajah, and even that American who is here, go through the garden to the pagoda."

"How do they accomplish that? Can you tell me?"

"They have hoods which they wear over their heads, and mitts which they wear on their hands."

"Good! Do you know where those hoods are kept, and how many there are of them?"

"They are in a room which opens upon the garden; the only room of the palace which does. And it also adjoins the private apartments of the rajah."

"And where is that room located?"

"Straight back through the palace from the spot where we now stand, at the end of the corridor. The apartments of the rajah are on the left, and the grand salon is on the right."

"Now, how many of those hoods are there, do you think?"

"I have seen three used at one time; I do not know if there are more than that or not."

"And now, Nadja, about yourself. It would not have done for me to command that you be returned to your home, or to interfere more than I did in the arrangements of the rajah concerning you. I would have exceeded my prerogatives if I had attempted that, and so spoiled all. Moreover, I can plainly see that it is his intention to keep you here for a far worse fate than it would be to become his wife. Hush! Be careful. I do not mean that you shall remain. Have I not already promised you that I will rescue you and restore you to those you love?"

"Yes; oh, yes."

"Is there one here—just one—among all these thousands of people, whom you can trust?"

"There is just one—Simrha."

"Who is he?"

"An old servant, who went to England with my mother and who is devoted to me."

"Go now, then, child, and find Simrha. Send him to me, and tell him to say to me: 'I am Simrha. Nadja sent me to you.' I will talk with him, and afterward you must do exactly as he directs—that is, if you are sure you may trust him implicitly."

"With my life and with my honor, sir."

"So be it. Send Simrha to me. And now go, for the rajah is returning, and with him is the man whom we have most to fear, and who, unless I greatly mistake, already suspects something."

And then, when Nadja had turned away after kneeling to receive his blessing, Nick added, in a low tone, to himself:

"Pray Heaven they have not looked inside the casket!"

Then, when the rajah and Carruthers approached, Nick addressed them before they had an opportunity to speak.

"Jaharanzubar, rajah of Matarapur," he said, "I have fasted thirty days and nights. I am hungry, and would eat; I am athirst, and would drink. And I beg that the people may be told to continue now with their festivities, and that presently, when the moon has risen, I will walk among them, with blessings to bestow on every hand."

"I will myself prepare food and drink for you——" began the rajah, but Nick interrupted him.

"Nay, nay," he said, "Give me one of your serving men to conduct me to a place where there is food and drink, and where I may rest for a while before I again appear among you. I would not take you from your pleasures. 'Tis a fitting celebration for the return of 'The Demon's Eye,' Jaharanzubar."

"First, priest," said the rajah, "before you go to eat and drink, tell me of the girl."

"Of the girl? Of the girl whom you would have wed, do you mean?"

"Yes; of Nadja."

"There is naught that I have to tell of her, save that she has been beseeching me that I should order you to have her conveyed back again from whence she came."

"And you—what said you to that, priest?"

"I said—nothing. I have no guardianship over tainted blood, rajah. It is enough for me that the rajah of Matarapur shall not wed with her, and that she be safe from molestation by all—as all others shall be—during the continuance of this feast."

Nick saw a quick look of understanding pass between the two men who faced him, but he turned away to follow a servant who had approached them, in obedience to a summons from the rajah.

Nick followed the servant silently, wondering, in the meanwhile, how he should be able to penetrate to the center of the garden of poison plants to rescue his assistants, whom he now knew were imprisoned there.

He was not sorry for the opportunity to partake of food, for, in truth, he was nearly starved; but the greatest surprise and pleasure awaited him when he seated himself to eat of the overflowing dishes that were placed before him, for he had scarcely swallowed the first mouthful when the servant bent forward and whispered:

"I am Simrha. Nadja sent me to you."

Nick was overjoyed, and with haste he replied:

"You speak English, do you, Simrha?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Never mind the sahibs; we haven't time for such things now. We will talk in English, while I eat and drink, for I am almost famished. Speak in very low tones. You used to live here, did you not?"

"Yes."

"You know the country round about here?"

"Thoroughly."

"You know the canyon of Godivari?"

"I do."

"And the cavern—the cavern of Indore?"

"I know about where it is. I do not know the entrance, nor does any other man."

"Do you know the painted rock—the rock with the idols painted on it, near where you suppose the cavern to be?"

"Yes."

"Push on that rock with all your strength, and you will find the way to the cavern. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Can you get Nadja out of the palace to-night, secretly?"

"It might be done, if she were disguised as a boy."

"Then disguise her as a boy and do it. Can you get horses—good horses?"

"Plenty of them. There are hundreds of them here, stabled in the palace stables and in the yards beyond."

"Good! Presently, when I walk among the people, you shall meet me outside and show me at what place you will leave four of the best horses that can be had, saddled and ready for the road. I want them left there so that I can find them at any time after midnight to-night. Can that be done?"

"It can."

"But, long before that, I wish you to be gone—you and Nadja. You are to disappear at the very first moment when it can be done with safety, so that neither of you will be missed after your departure. And, when you go, you will ride straight to the cavern of Godivari, enter it by pushing hard against the painted rock, as I have directed, and wait for me there. Will you do that?"

"I will."

"Remember to meet me outside and show me where you will leave the horses for me."

"Yes."

"Now, how many of those hoods are there in the room which opens upon the poison garden—I mean the hoods which one wears in order to enter the garden without injury?"

"There are many of them, sir—more than enough for what you want."

"And when may I, with safety, approach that room without the fear of being discovered?"

"Ah, that is another matter, but exactly at midnight it would be safest. Have you finished? I will show you where you are to sleep, and, later, I will place in that room four suits of the rajah's, which will serve as disguises for yourself and your friends. Nadja has told me sufficient so that I understand, sir, and I hope—and think—that the escape may be accomplished. I have friends among that multitude outside."

"Simrha," said Nick, "I'd like to shake hands with you. You're a brick!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE RAJAH.

Nick Carter's plans had been so swiftly, but so deftly, laid, and were, withal, so simple of achievement in their aspect that it seemed impossible that they should miscarry.

In Nadja's servant, Simrha, he found what would have been indispensable, for, without the aid of this resourceful man, he would have been almost helpless to carry out what he had undertaken.

As it was, however, everything went smoothly.

There seemed to be no suspicion whatever in the minds of the rajah, or even of Carruthers, that Indore, the high

priest of Godivari, was not all that he appeared to be, and it is doubtful if the thought of such a possibility ever once occurred to either of the men.

Following upon the hearty meal which Nick ate, under the ministrations of Simrha, he took that walk he had promised among the people on the plain, passing among them, with austere dignity, but raising his hands and head in benediction every few paces.

And the throng pressed around him eagerly and joyously, for the fame and the godliness of Indore had spread far and wide throughout the land.

Nothing could have been better for Nick's purposes than the presence of these thousands of people surrounding the palace of the rajah; and, when he at last arrived at the place where Simrha was to leave the horses in readiness for him and his assistants when they should succeed in making their escape from the garden of the poison plants, he was forced to admit to himself that the way of escape from the territory of Matarapur seemed almost open before him.

Throughout the balance of the day he held almost entirely aloof from the rajah and his followers, holding no converse with them whatever; but, as this was entirely to be expected from the high priest of Godivari, it created no comment and engendered no surprise.

He did manage, however, to speak again with Nadja.

"Obey Simrha in everything," he said to her. "He is worthy of all your trust."

"Will it be to-night?" she asked of him.

"It must be to-night or never."

"And your friends in the garden of the poison plants?"

"They will be with us, or I will be here with them," was the grim reply. "But, whatever happens, Nadja, you will be well on your way to escape, and Simrha will see you through. Wait for me three days at the place of appointment, and, if I have not appeared by that time, tell Simrha to take you to the coast by the shortest possible route."

With that, they parted, and they did not meet again until—but it will not do to anticipate.

* * * * * * *

Through the garden of poisons, with stealthy tread, their heads shrouded in impenetrable hoods, four men hurried, with stealthy tread, their bodies bent forward and every motion they made suggesting tense eagerness and caution.

Halfway between the pagoda, in the center of the garden, and the point where they intended to enter the palace, a figure rose up before them, and, with a chuckling laugh, attempted to bar their progress.

For an instant Nick Carter, who was in advance, hesitated; and then, suddenly, he remembered Nadja's account of the terrible experiment made by her grandfather, in that he had reared a child in that awful garden, and so imbued it with the poisons that now, although it had become an old man, the poisons were its life.

But the man was old and feeble. Doubtless he had never possessed real strength to any degree; at all events, a slight push from the hand of Nick Carter sent him tottering back among the poison things beside the path, and the four went on their way toward the palace, while they heard the man of poisons chuckling aloud, and without attempting to rise from the spot where he had fallen.

And then they came to the door into the palace.

They passed through and closed it, and threw aside their hoods; and then, as they turned, led by the detective, toward the costumes which Simrha had provided, so that they would be able to pass unnoticed and unchallenged among the throng of people on the plain, the door which communicated with the corridor of the palace was opened suddenly, and Maitland Carruthers, followed by the rajah himself, stepped quickly into the room.

For one instant the surprise and amazement of both parties created an interesting tableau, for it was evident that Carruthers and the rajah were even more astonished by the encounter than were Nick and his assistants.

But Nick Carter did not give them time to recover from their surprise.

With one bound, he alighted upon Carruthers, seized him in his powerful arms, raised him from the stone floor and then hurled him down upon it with a force that should have snapped more than one of his bones; nor did Carruthers attempt to move from where he had fallen.

Stranger still, he made no attempt to defend himself, and Nick fancied that he saw a look of horror come into the man's face when he beheld him. Later, he remembered that he was at that moment without disguise, and that Carruthers must have thought in that instant that he was face to face with the ghost of the man he had killed in such a cowardly manner.

Chick attended to the rajah.

He leaped upon him in much the same way in which Nick served Carruthers, although he treated him rather more gently; and then, as soon as the two men were

down, Patsy and Ten-Ichi came forward, cords were taken from the walls of the room and with these the two men were bound so securely that there would be no hope of their escaping from their bonds without assistance.

"Come, Chick," said the detective, then. "We will put them where they put you. They will be safer there than elsewhere until we get out of this. Put a hood over the rajah's head and another over your own, and follow me."

He tied a hood over Carruthers' head, and, having placed one over his own, he raised the body of the man who had so lately tried to murder him, and carried it as if it had been that of a child through the garden of poisons to the pagoda in the center.

Chick followed with the rajah, and ten minutes later the two detectives were back again in the palace, having left their prisoners helpless for the time being.

"What brought them here at this hour?" asked Chick, referring to the encounter.

"They came to rid themselves of a nuisance," replied Nick. "If I had been an hour later in rescuing you from the garden, I would have found only three corpses when I arrived."

Out of the palace, through the grounds immediately in front of it, along the path which leads around it and among the shrubbery at one end, Nick and his companions hastened, without incident and without encountering a person.

They were now arrayed in costumes of the country, to be sure. Costumes which belonged personally to the rajah himself, and which Simrha had procured for them, and so they hurried on to the place where the horses were awaiting them.

They were there, too, and ready for them.

Simrha had kept his word in every detail.

Four handsome Arabian steeds, sleek of coat, wiry of limb, deep of withers, with small, bony heads and wide nostrils, each one of the horses looked to be as fleet as the wind.

To leap into the saddles, to thread their way through that labyrinth of tents toward the trail which leads to the Godivari, to lean forward in answer to summons, and to whisper replies to questions asked as they passed along, for it was an unwritten law of courtesy not to disturb the sleeping ones at that hour of night—all that was the occupation of the next hour, for it required all that time to make their way over the league of distance which separated them from the trail.

But it was accomplished at last, and then—away!

The horses fulfilled the expectations of their riders, and, moreover, they seemed tireless, too, so that, when the sun rose and our party stopped for a moment of rest and to water their horses, they were already many leagues from the palace of the rajah of Matarapur.

* * * * * * *

At the cavern of Indore they found Simrha and Nadja awaiting them, although Simrha had practiced his art of disguising so well that even Nick Carter would have found it difficult to have recognized in this handsome lad any resemblance whatever to the beautiful young woman who had besought his help the preceding day.

The journey from the cavern to the railway, and thence to the coast and safety, was not undertaken at once. Indeed, the detective decided that the safest way for them would be to remain where they were for at least two weeks—that is, until the rajah had given up all hope of overtaking the fugitives; after that the journey could be made in safety.

This plan was carried out, and it worked to a charm.

Two weeks from the day they arrived at the cavern they started for the railway; but not toward Sholapur, by which way they had come. Instead of that, they took a more northerly course, and eventually arrived in safety at Dhoua Junction, from whence they traveled to Bombay without incident worthy of note in this record.

At Bombay Nick Carter saw Nadja Covington and Simrha safely embarked for England, and he knew that he had forever won the gratitude of one woman, at least.

* * * * * * *

In New York, at the establishment of Orloff & Co., when Nick Carter placed the real "Demon's Eye" in the outstretched hand of Peyton Storms, the latter gasped with pleasure and astonishment, as he exclaimed:

"How did you secure possession of it, Carter?"

"In precisely the same way they did the act," was the reply; "by sleight of hand. When I was making passes over the casket which contained it, I removed it, and, when I locked the casket with the golden key, 'The Demon's Eye' was in the palm of my hand, and not inside the casket. It was as easy as living on a farm."

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 455, will contain "Nick Carter's Human Weapon; or, The Woman with the Branded Face."

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